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***SRI BHAGAVATA DHARMA MISSION SERIES***

***VOLUME VI***



**AUTHOR AND PUBLISHER**

**BHAI MANILAL C. PAREKH**



**SRI BHAGAVATA DHARMA MISSION**

**HARMONY HOUSE**

**RAJKOT-INDIA**

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III

# **SRI VALLABHACHARYA**

**LIFE, TEACHINGS AND MOVEMENT**

**(A Religion of Grace)**

BY

**BHAI MANILAL C. PAREKH**

*Religious Teacher and Author*



**SRI BHAGAVATA DHARMA MISSION**  
**HARMONY HOUSE**

**RAJKOT**

. . .

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To  
All the Theists or Bhagavatas  
of whatever Race or Religion,  
Hindu, Moslem, Christian,  
Zoroastrian, Jew etc., etc.,  
this book dealing with  
the Life, Teachings and Movement  
of a great and noble Bhagavata  
is lovingly dedicated.

## ERRATA

Page	Line	For	Read
5	19	enunciation	renunciation
12	20	beacause	because
15	5	serions	serious
18	29	and — the	and is the
22	30	ever	even
67	19	mid night	midnight
78	13	number — his	number of his
87	5	all encompassing	all-encompassing
92	26	Hiudu	Hindu
„	29	peopled	peoples
93	22	it own	its own
104	5	dontained	contained
„	15	priviledge	privilege
„	16	aud	and
106	11	pourtrayed	portrayed
„	25	Scripture	Scriptures
111	17	iu	in
123	7	irrevokably	irrevocably
124	8	priviledges	privileges
143	18	a mazed	amazed
170	9	against	with
171	9	religon	religion
174	20	it	if
180	29	expositary	expository
183	29	1438	1538
235	32	perseverence	perseverance
239	22	proprietary	proprietary
240	14	snrrendering	surrendering
252	27	fealing	feeling
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488	4	solvation	salvation
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## PREFACE

It is with deep gratefulness to God that I present herewith to the public the third English volume of this Series. The aim underlying Sri Bhagavata Dharma Series is to show the deep underlying unity between different religions of the world, especially the theistic ones. It is a deep and firm conviction of mine, fortified by study, observation and practice of various religious *Sadhanas* extending over a generation, that all religions, including even the non-theistic ones, have Providence behind them, and that there is none which, in its institutional form at any rate, can claim absolute monopoly of Truth and Love. There are grave differences between one religion and another, but in spite of these the elements of harmony and unity between them are greater than those of discord. The purpose of the present Series is to bring out these common elements without suppressing in the least the individuality of any religion or sect, and thereby to strengthen the forces of pure and loving devotion to God in the world.

I am fully conscious of the fact that in doing this work, I am open to the charge of latitudinarianism or relativism or syncretism. I have found, however, from personal experience that if one has to make his choice only between absolutism on one hand and relativism on the other, as seems inevitable under the present circumstances, the latter is decidedly the better of the two. This is so for the simple reason that unfortunately every religious system professing to be absolute has tended to be imperialistic in the worst sense of the term. A religion is seen at its purest only in its founder. As it develops its life in course of time, and grows in numbers, prestige and power, it naturally gives rise to Religious Imperialism, which has been one of the greatest curses of humanity. Such imperialism is much worse than that of the political variety, and almost invariably the latter is used to further the ends of the former. This has been pre-eminently the case with the two Semitic religions, Christianity and Islam, both of which profess to be absolute. Whatever they be in their origin, they have become in course of time Imperialisms of the

worst type, and the work of proselytism carried on by them for so long a time has done much harm to the civilizations, cultures and religions of different peoples. Perhaps the worst of such work has been the violence done to the teachings and the spirit of the founders of these religions themselves. This is particularly true of Christianity.

The religious movement, described in the present volume, has played a significant part in the history of the Bhagavata Dharma in India. It has some original features of its own which distinguish it from other Bhakti movements of the land. It is, nevertheless, an integral part of the great Bhakti Marga and as such it has carried its message to the whole of Western India including Gujarata, Rajputana, Marwar, Mewad and even Sindh. It came into being just about the time when the Moguls were establishing their Empire and its growth ran side by side with that of the Mogul power. It continued to grow even during the darkest days of the persecution of the Hindus under Aurangzebe, and it has gone on increasing in size ever since. It came thus as a vital part of the Hindu Renaissance which gave the Hindus a new consciousness of their cultural and religious heritage just when they were in need of it the most. It is, moreover, purely Hindu in its origin and development, and has remained such altogether in spite of the fact that all its work lay in those parts of India which were affected much by Moslem influence. In this it differs much from some of the religious movements which came into being about the same time in North India. Because of its indigenous character, it was extremely helpful in reviving some of the religious heritage of the Hindus among the people of Western India. It played thus an important part in the creation of the new national consciousness of the Hindus under the Moguls, which was their only safeguard against the political and religious imperialism of such an Emperor as Aurangzebe. While doing this work, the movement of Vallabha was luckily saved from developing a political consciousness of its own. It never gathered strength enough to do this, and has remained more a persecuted sect than a persecuting Church.

It must be added here that the movement of Vallabha as conceived and propagated by him was a purely spiritual one. Its contribution to the national consciousness of the Hindus was only a by-product of his work. His sole aim was to bring about the salvation of souls through Bhakti, and things such as national or cultural Renaissance were beyond his ken altogether. According to him, this movement was nothing but a New Dispensation vouchsafed by God out of His infinite mercy and grace for the redemption and salvation of souls. It was a special Revelation of God given to the people of India under the extremely difficult conditions of life that had arisen in the land owing to the advent of the *Kali Yuga*, the Dark Age. The presence of the Moslem power was only one more sign of the same and added to the validity of this New Dispensation. So far as Vallabha and some of his great followers were concerned, the Way of Bhakti revealed through him was meant as much for the Hindus as for the Moslems. It transcended the bounds of caste, race, and sex. It was universal in its scope and made no distinctions between man and man. In it we see Hinduism in one of its highest and noblest forms. According to Vallabha, it was Bhakti Marga at its highest. So conscious was he of the predominant part played by the grace of God in it that he called it Pusti Marga, the Way of Grace, as distinguished from Bhakti Marga, the Way of Devotion. This is the most original feature of his teaching, and in this extraordinary emphasis on the grace of God, he stands almost alone among the religious teachers of India. There is no doubt that at the time of Vallabha, God's Providence was specially active on behalf of the people of the land. This is testified to by the simultaneous rise of two such eminent teachers of Bhakti as he and Sri Chaitanya, and they were followed soon by a number of others. The period in which Vallabha lived was a critical one in the history of the Hindus, and the new wave of Bhakti which swept over the land helped not only in the preservation and consolidation of Hinduism but carried it a stage further in the direction of its becoming a truly universal religion. Herein we find one more proof of the fulfil-



ment of the promise given by God in the Bhagwada Gita, viz, "Whenever there is decay of righteousness, I descend in person." (Chap. IV. 7.). A unique feature of Hindu religious life extending over a period of some three to four thousand years has been the rise of great men at every critical moment of its existence, and the time of Vallabha was no exception to this rule.

To write on the Life, Teachings and Movement of so original a teacher of Bhakti Marga as Vallabha was an attraction enough in itself. This was not, however, the only reason for my taking up the work in hand. I should never have thought of doing it but for the fact that of all the Acharyas, Vallabha is the only one of whom so little is written in the English language. His own church, which contains a number of highly educated and well-placed people, should have brought out a book dealing with his life and teachings in English, and thus placed them within the reach of a larger public long since. The need for such a book has been all the greater, since whatever little is known of Vallabha and his teachings by people outside his Church is full of misconceptions. Because of this, much injustice has been done to the great teacher by the general public including scholars of both the East and the West. People have judged him and his teachings largely by the aberrations that his movement has undergone in the course of its history. For about a century at least, the fair name of Vallabha and the truly spiritual character of his teachings have been veiled under a thick mist of prejudice and misconception. The responsibility for this state of things lies primarily at the doors of the followers of Vallabha themselves. It is my earnest hope that the present book may lift some of this mist from the mind of the general public, and that it may be of help to the followers of Vallabha in understanding the true character of their own faith.

While I have dared to write a book of this kind, I am fully aware of my shortcomings as the author thereof. I am not a professed disciple of Vallabha and have had no touch with his movement for about three decades. In addition to this, the subject

is a vast one and difficult to deal with. Its vastness is self-evident and the difficulties attending it have been manifold. Authentic historical materials for the first century of the movement including the life of Vallabha are extremely meagre, and I have had to make my way through a thick jungle of mutually conflicting traditions. I am afraid I have relied a little too much on the authorities that I came across first in my study of the movement, and a few mistakes have crept in. The followers of Vallabha himself are divided among themselves in regard to the dates of a number of events in his life, and even if I had found a worthy collaborator belonging to the Church, I could not have satisfied all the parties. For several reasons I had to work entirely single-handed, and the entire MS was ready before any follower of Vallabha came even to know of it. In a way this has been a good thing, for it makes the book an entirely spontaneous and independent production, and it is as such that I offer it to the followers of Vallabha and the general public. For me the writing of this book has been a veritable pilgrimage to and communion with the spirits of Vallabha, Narasimha Mehta, Chaitanya, Mirabai, Vitthalnatha etc., etc.

The book is also a tribute to the sacred memory of the following persons who have helped in one way or another in predisposing me in favour of the subject thereof. The first of these is my father. While the faith of our family has been Jainism for centuries, my father adopted the Vaishnavism of Vallabha as his personal faith. Its belief in and devotion to God made a deep appeal to him from his youth and he remained true to it to the end of his days. It gave, besides, a warmth and depth to his parental love such as I have seen in few fathers, and his behaviour towards me in my many wanderings and vicissitudes of religious life was very like that of the father of the Prodigal Son. This love was so great that it easily crossed all the bounds of caste and creed, and confounded the bigotry of such differing peoples as the Jains, Hindus, Brahmas and Christians. His behaviour towards me was a matter of real wonder to those who knew the full

significance of it, and they rightly saw in it the highest manifestation of parental love. It was his warm-hearted *Vatsalya* which drew him naturally to the *Vatsalya-Bhakti* of Vallabhi Vaishnavism.

I came under another influence of the same kind in my boyhood. Owing to the transfer of my father to places where Anglo-vernacular schools did not exist, I had to study for four years in Gondal. While here I stayed with the family of my mother's maternal uncle. The faith of this family being Vaishnavism, I came naturally to know the latter in a more intimate way than I had been able to do in my own home. I found, besides, in my great grand-mother a living embodiment of Vaishnavism. Mellowed with age, she devoted herself to the service of her God Bala-Krishna, her large family, relations, neighbours, and to that of all and sundry who came to her seeking advice of all kinds. She did all the good she could in this way without being even conscious of the fact that she was doing anything meritorious. It might be a matter of interest to some readers of this book that her only son, the late Mr. Kapoorchand M. Parekh, was the earliest friend of Mahatma Gandhi.

I must also pay my tribute to another person who has exercised a profound and lasting influence on my life and work. Early in youth I came under the spell of the spirit and teachings of Brahmarshi Keshub Chunder Sen, the great leader of the Brahma Samaj, and a true Prophet of modern times. He passed away before I was born, but his influence on my soul and spirit has not been any the less potent on that account. One of the most important doctrines that he preached, especially in his latter days, was the Harmony of Religions. It was an integral part of what he called the New Dispensation, and perhaps no man has done more than he to bring the various religions close together. Not only did he preach this Harmony, but he lived it in his life and built a Church, a living religious community, on that. It is as a disciple, even as a spiritual son of his that I have learnt to appreciate, love and revere all the great religions of the world. This does not necessarily mean that we are to look upon all



religions as equally true. What it does mean, however, is that all of them have the soul of goodness and the spirit of God in them, and that we should approach them in the spirit of seekers and disciples rather than in that of critics. If one must necessarily err in doing this, it is better to do so on the side of reverence than on that of criticism. Men have all along erred grievously in judging religions other than what they mistakenly call their own, and errors of this type have led to serious crimes against humanity and heinous sin against God. This is the sin of sectarianism, and it has divided mankind into mutually hostile camps in the name of religion. What should have been the chief uniting power in the world between man and man, has been turned by the wicked perversity of man into the worst of divisive forces. So great has been the hatred of the followers of different religions for one another and so disastrous to mankind have been its effects that many sane men even are coming to believe that the world would be a better place to live in if religion did not exist at all. This is, of course, going to the other extreme. The true remedy for the evil lies in a systematic cultivation of not merely toleration but such reverence and devotion for all the religions and their founders as Keshub preached and practised. Devotion of this kind is not necessarily incompatible with absolute love for one Teacher or Prophet or Incarnation. Such devotion to one person, however, is of a spurious kind if it alienates us from other teachers, and it is much more so if it breeds in us feelings of dislike or hatred for them. Perfect loyalty to a Person like Buddha or Christ or Krishna should also increase our love for all people irrespective of their creed or faith. In connection with this the following story told of Baha U'llah, the great Persian Prophet of modern times, contains a very important lesson for the whole of humanity. Two of his disciples held different views about him, and not coming to any decision about the matter they approached him to know from his own mouth how they should believe in him. His reply to this query was this: "You both are right provided you do not let your love for each other grow

less on account of this difference of opinion between you, and you both are wrong if you love each other the less on account of your belief." I learnt from Brahmarsbi Keshub something of this kind of love and reverence for all the great teachers and saints of the world, and it is largely due to it that I have been able to write on the present subject in the way I have done.

This lesson was enforced on my mind further still by my personal contact with Upadhyaya Gour Govinda Roy, one of the chief disciples of Keshub. Soon after my graduation in the Bombay University, I proceeded to Calcutta, the head-quarters of the Church of Keshub. To me this was nothing less than a pilgrimage. I stayed there for about four months and had the good fortune to know intimately a number of disciples of Keshub. These men had imbibed the spirit of their master to a remarkable extent and had made it the rule of their life for almost half a century. Gour Govinda was one of these and in some respects he was the ablest of them all. As early as 1875 he was entrusted by Keshub with the task of studying the whole of Hinduism in the light of the New Dispensation. This defined the mission of his life, and as a result of his studies, by the time I saw him in 1909, he had written a number of books in Sanskrit and Bengali. Two of the most important of these are his Vedanta Samanvaya and Gita Samanvaya Bhashya, written originally in Sanskrit and then translated by him into Bengali. He wrote, besides, a Life of Sri Krishna and also a Life of Sri Chaitanya in Bengali. All his writings are full of deep devotion and thought, and because of these characteristics of theirs, they have played an important part in the revival of the best of Hinduism in our times. It was in his company that I learnt to appreciate Vaishnavism in general better than I had done before.

It is with profound gratefulness that I pay this tribute of mine to the four persons mentioned here. It is their influence which has predisposed me in favour of the subject and helped me to treat it with love and devotion.

While writing this book, I had to study and refer to some scores of works belonging to the Church of Vallabha and also to look into a great deal of allied literature. Most of these works are mentioned in the body of the book itself. I take this opportunity, however, to acknowledge my debt of gratitude to the authors of all of them for the help I have received from their writings.

The publication of the book at a time when the price of paper etc., had gone up almost eight to ten times the normal ones was a real problem. Books of this type, lacking in elements of popular appeal, are not even self-supporting, not to mention any financial return for the same to the authors thereof. Under the circumstances they have to be published, in our country at any rate, with monetary help from those who would sympathize with the subjects treated. Luckily for this book, I found one such in Mr. Ranchhoddas V. Patwari, a most prominent Vaishnava of Vallabha's Church. He is a close neighbour of mine and has known me almost from my early youth. It was, however, hard for him and other Vaishnavas at first to believe that any one, not belonging to their faith, could be interested enough in it to write a book of this size with real sympathy and understanding. To make matters worse, they had all the time looked upon me as a heretic if not an apostate. Their faith had suffered much at the hands of outsiders, and for aught they knew, this book might be another attack on it. Mr. Patwari's interest and enthusiasm, however, grew with the reading of the MS, and he came to feel that the book for which he had been waiting for over a generation, had appeared thus providentially. He then set about getting help for its publication, and as a result of his kind efforts, a sum of Rs. 1500 was collected from various persons. About one half of this sum is a contribution towards the expenses, the remainder being payment in advance for eighty copies of the book. The persons who helped in this way are as follows: Dewan Bahadur Motilal Laloobhai, Dewan Saheb, Baraia State, who gave Rs. 750: Mr. R. V. Patwari, Rs. 250: Sheths Devidas Madhavji, Vallabhadas Karsondas Natha and Jethabhai Kalianjee of Bombay, and Sheths

Chimanlal Girdharlal and Govindbhai Maneklal of Ahmedabad, Rs. 100 each. I am grateful to all these gentlemen for their kind help in this matter, and especially so to Dewan Bahadur Motilal who, with his handsome contribution, gave a start to the collection.

I must also thank here the Revenue Minister of the Udaipur State who has authorized the Munsarim (the person in charge of the Court of Wards at Nathdwara) to purchase fifty copies of the book on behalf of the Krishna Bhandar.

Besides, the Trustees of Harjivandas Purushottamdas of Dhandhuka Trust Fund, viz., Sheths Maneklal Manilal and Motilal Govindlal of Ahmedabad have been kind enough to purchase books worth about Rs. 250, for which I am thankful to them.

These contributions and orders in advance have come through the kind offices of Mr. Patwari. For all this and for his keen interest in the publication and propagation of this book, I am deeply grateful to him. A contemporary and fellow-believer of my father, he has taken very kindly to this work, and his genuine and warm-hearted appreciation of the book has given me much satisfaction and encouragement.

I thank Mr. Laloobhai C. Desai, an enthusiastic publisher of Vaishnava literature, for his kind gift of the requisite number of copies of the picture of Vallabha appearing in the book and for an order of fifty copies of the book itself.

Two more persons remain to be thanked. One of these is Mr. Chaturbhuj Soneji of Bombay, a personal and close friend of mine for the last thirty years. He has made a contribution of Rs. 200 towards the expenses of the publication. The other person is a Vaishnava of note of Bombay who, while contributing Rs. 500, has, with true magnanimity of heart, chosen to remain unknown.

15 August 43  
Harmony House, RAJKOT. }

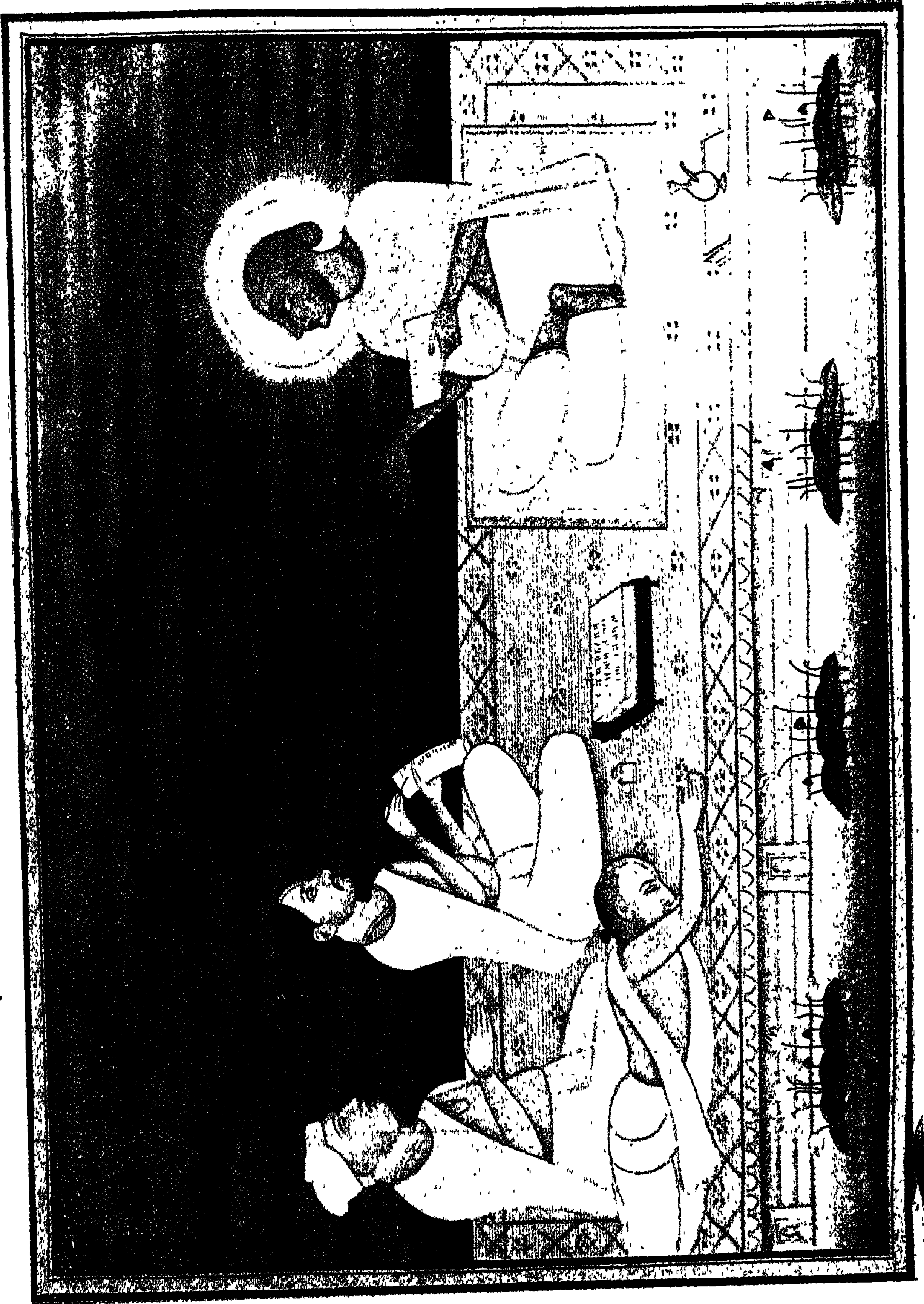
MANILAL C. PAREKH.



अखंडभूमंडलाचार्य जगद्गुरु श्रीमद्वल्लभाचार्यजीमहाप्रभुजी.

श्रीकृष्णगढमांना चित्रनी यथास्थित प्रतिकृति.

सं. १५६७मां बादशाह सिकंदर लोदीना हुकमथी होनहार नामना चित्रकारे लीयुं.



लल्लुभाई छगनलाल देसाई. रीचीरोड, नं. ५७- अमदावाद.

सरैया आर्ट प्रिन्टरी; न्युरोड, खाडोआ-अमदावाद.



## BOOK I

### CHAPTER I

#### **Vallabha's Family, Birth and Education**

Vallabhacharya was born in a Brahmin family of Andhra-Desha belonging to the Bharadwaja Gotra of the Taitriya branch of Yajura-Veda. The family seems to have been devoted to its priestly vocation as is evident from the fact that several members thereof, in the course of seven generations, are said to have written books dealing with religious subjects. One of these called Yagnanarayanabhata is said to have received his initiation from a Vaishnava ascetic. His devotion to God was great enough to be rewarded with a promise by God Himself that He would take birth in his family. Another ancestor of Vallabhacharya, Ganapatibhatta, worked against the spread of Tantrism and wrote a book called *Sarva-Tantra-Nigraha* in refutation of that faith. His son Balambhata wrote some books on the subject of religion, one of them being Bhakti-Dipa, the Light of Devotion.

This Balambhata had two sons, Laxmanabhata and Janaradana. The former of these was married to Yallamagaru, a daughter of one Susharma, who was a priest in the royal family of Vijayanagara. Laxmanabhata left the world after he had one son and two daughters by her. He wandered about for some time perhaps in search of some Guru or for the purpose of pilgrimage. In course of time he found a highly spiritual man of the name of Premakara and devoted himself wholly to his service. Meantime his father, taking the wife of the son and her mother with him, went on a search for him. After some time the party came to the place where Premakara lived. When they all went

to pay their respects to him, he was so moved at the forlorn manner of Vallamagaru that he blessed her saying that she would have a son in future. At this the mother of the young woman acquainted him with her story and prayed him to bless her further so that her husband might return to her. The Swami did this, and soon after Laxmanabhata, who had been out of the house, returned and was surprised to see his family there. Premakara then asked him to go back with his people, which he did while his father remained with the Swami.

Some time after this Laxmanabhata went on a pilgrimage together with his family to some of the sacred places in the Eastern part of India. He came to Prayaga where he met one Krishnadas, the chief minister of the Champaranya State. This man had no son and knowing Laxmanabhata to be a holy man, he prayed him for the gift of a son through his blessing. This boon was granted and in course of time a son was born in the family of Krishnadas. This child is said to have played some part later on in the movement started by Vallabhacharya. From Prayaga Laxmanabhata went to Benares, where he made his home, for some time at any rate.

Here we come across a definite fact in the history of the family of Vallabhacharya. There is no doubt that Laxmanabhata, the father of Vallabha, had settled down in this holy city for some time before the birth of the latter. This shows for certain that he was a deeply religious man, who loved the great city for its sacred traditions. Had it not been for this, he would never have come with his family from his province in South India to this place. He must have been also a learned man, for he is said to have moved in the society of the Pundits of Benares. This also explains how he came to give what was an excellent education for those days to his boys. Together with this he was a man of means as he is said to have performed a number of Yagnas, which was indeed a costly affair requiring the feeding of large numbers of Brahmins.



Some time after he had settled down in Benares, a rumour started that a Moslem invasion of the city was imminent. This created much uneasiness among the people with the result that those who could afford to leave the city started to go to different places. Laxmanabhatta was among these and he left for South India which was his original home. It was in the course of this journey southward that Vallamagaru gave birth to Vallabha. This event took place on Thursday, the eleventh day of the dark half of the month of Vaishakh in the Samvat year 1535, corresponding to A. D. 1479 \*. It was a dark night and the party was resting in a forest of Champa trees when the birth of the child took place. Instead of joy, however, it was a matter of sorrow for the parents, for the babe appeared to be still-born. Evidently it was prematurely born owing to the weariness and anxiety of the mother who, along with the party, was required to make forced marches. They all had taken shelter for the night in this forest and it was essential that they should leave early the next day. Under the circumstances Laxmanabhatta wrapped the still-born babe in a piece of cloth and left it in a hole in the trunk of a tree. It was fortunate that he did not bury it as should have been done ordinarily, which was perhaps due to the fact that the party had neither time nor implements required for the burial. Leaving the babe or what they thought was its corpse to the mercy of the elements and wild beasts, Laxmanabhatta proceeded together with the party to the next stage of their flight.

This must have been a matter of sore trial to the mother, both physically and mentally. The march soon after her delivery together with the sorrow for the death in this manner of her child was bound to affect her in every way. She must have been terribly depressed in this state of things. She had, besides, some

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\* There is a divergence of opinion in Vallabha's church in regard to the date of his birth, some believing it to have taken place in Samvat 1529 ( A. D. 1473 ). We have accepted the year A. D. 1479 because it seems to fit in with the rest of Vallabha's life better.

lingering doubts whether the babe was after all still-born. Her mother's instinct told her that it was after all alive and that her husband and others were wrong in taking it for dead and leaving it in such indecent haste. This must have been gnawing at her heart all day and especially at night when the party reached their next halting-place.

It is said that both the mother and the father of Vallabha had a dream that night, in which God appeared to them and told them that He had taken birth in the form of that babe which they had left behind as dead. They were asked to go back to it as it was still alive. Accordingly they returned to the place where they found much to their amazement and fear the babe surrounded by a fire. The babe was living, with fire wrapped round it like a protecting angel. The mother then extended her arms and took it without being hurt in any way by the fire.

They then went to a neighbouring town, which happened to be Champaranya,\* the place where Krishnadas mentioned above was the minister. The latter was overjoyed to see them and made all arrangements for them to stay there for some time. While they were here they came to learn that the Moslem invasion, the fear of which had been the cause of their flight, had not taken place. The family then returned to Benares where it started its life as before, except that they had an addition to it in the form of little Vallabha, who was born in the midst of much affliction. This babe was the happiest memento of their flight that they had brought back with them to the holy city.

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\* This place, different from the one bearing the same name in Bihar, is situated in Central Provinces near Raipur. Close to it is a big forest of Champa trees extending over four miles. There is a kind of superstition hanging about this forest to the effect that any pregnant woman passing through it is sure to suffer from a miscarriage. A sort of small shrine called Bethaka in the language of the Vallabha's Church, has been built at the place in the forest where Vallabha was supposed to have been born.

Vallabha is said to have been an extraordinary child. He showed his predilections for the life he was going to lead later on by the way he made his choice of certain things. At the *Anna-prashana* ceremony performed when he was six months old, when various kinds of things were placed before him for him to make his choice therefrom, he picked up a book rather than toys.

Vallabha was the fourth child of his parents. The other three had been born to his mother before Laxmanabhata had left his family. That he should have been born after the return of his father from what was nothing less than renunciation of the world, has some significance of its own. During this period of separation from her husband, Yallamagaru had passed through much misery and anguish, which could not but have a very chastening and sanctifying effect on her. The meeting of both the husband and the wife so accidentally and yet providentially at the *Ashrama* of Premakara, the blessing of the latter given to both of them, the return of Laxmanabhata back to the life of the householder, the price which his father willingly paid in order to free him from his vow of enunciation, etc., were all a series of extraordinary events. This provided as good an immediate natural heredity for Vallabha as it is possible to imagine, apart from the high character of the family for generations.

Two more children were born to Yallamagaru after Vallabha. One of these called Keshava died some time after his birth. He was followed by another boy, who was called by the same name as it was believed that he was the child Keshava reborn. The family had thus in all five children of the names Ram Krishna, Sarasvati, Subhadra, Vallabha and Keshava.

Apart from other things these names of children, especially of the boys, signify that the faith of the family was Vaishnavism. We are not quite sure, however, as to which particular Sampradaya, i. e. Church, the family belonged. It is not unlikely that it had some

kind of affiliation with the Sampradaya of Vishnu Swami. There has been a persistent tradition among the followers of Vallabha for centuries of there being a very close connection between his Church and that of Vishnu Swami. Whatever this be, there is no doubt that the family lived in an atmosphere of deep religiousness supplemented by love of learning. Vallabha had thus in his childhood and boyhood as good a social heredity as it was possible to have for a genius of his type.

Laxmanabhata seems to have been very particular about the education of his children, especially the boys. Vallabha is said to have begun his studies when he was five years old, and being endowed by birth with talents of a high order, he made a most remarkable progress in all directions within a short period.

In his eighth year Vallabha was entrusted with the sacred thread, a ceremony which is one of the most important in the life of a Brahmin. It was the symbol of his entrance into Brahminhood proper, a kind of second birth. Soon after this he was entrusted to the care of a teacher called Vishnuchita for the prosecution of his studies in a serious manner. He had now entered what is called the *Brahmacharyashrama*, the stage of life in which one prepares himself for the life of a devout householder. It is a kind of semi-*Sannyasa*, a fitting prelude according to the Hindus for family life.

The education of Vallabha, begun in this manner, was in Samskrit, the sacred language of the Hindus, and the studies consisted mostly of subjects pertaining to religion. This was all the more necessary, because Vallabha, being a Brahmin, was predestined to be a priest. As his family belonged to the Yajurveda Branch, it was essential for him to study that Veda and the literature bearing on it. This in itself was a subject large enough to engage the attention of a student all his life. Vishnuchita, in all probability, was a worthy teacher, but his pupil was one of the



most talented boys of that period, and accordingly made a most rapid and satisfactory progress in all his studies. Benares was then a great centre of Hindu learning, the best in India, abounding in teachers of every variety. It is not unlikely that Vallabha learnt from some of these, his own fame as a kind of prodigy creating much interest on their part in him. The tradition of his Church says that he was known in his early boyhood among his teachers for his proficiency in learning and extraordinary intelligence as Baba-Saraswati, a name which signifies that he was the goddess of learning in the form of a child. Whatever this be, there is no doubt that within these four years that his systematic studies lasted in Benares, Vallabha made an extraordinary progress such as few boys of his age ever did. This can be understood only in relation to what he did in his later life. He is the only man who attained to the rank of an Acharya, i. e. founder of a new system of religious belief and practice, with an education received in what was little more than the minimum of time. He is credited by his followers with having not only studied but even mastered during the short period of about five or six years the Vedas together with their auxiliaries, the six systems of Hindu Philosophy, the chief scriptural books of the Bhagawata Dharma, viz., the Gita, the Bhagawata Purana and the Pancha Ratna, etc., etc.

Whatever this be, the education that had begun under such happy auspices came to an untimely end. About the time Vallabha was entering his eleventh year, Laxmanabhatta passed away in Samvat 1546 (A. D. 1490), leaving his family in a precarious condition as regards their residence. They had settled down in Benares for a few years only, which was hardly enough to give the family a *locus standi* in that great city, especially as the boys were young. The death of Laxmanabhatta, under these circumstances, meant primarily the break-up of their home in Benares, an event which soon followed. This also meant the end of Vallabha's systematic education.

## CHAPTER II

**Vallabha as Brahmachari Pilgrim**

It has been said that the family of Vallabha belonged to Andhra-desha, from where Laxmanabhata had come to Benares. Now that he was no more, there was no reason for the widowed mother of Vallabha and her children, all of whom were young, to stay in that city, far away from their original home, any longer. They had most of their relations in the south, some of them holding high positions in matters of learning as well as religious office in the state of Vidyanagara. Under these circumstances, it was thought proper for them to go to this city, which was then at the zenith of its prosperity and power.

In the traditional accounts of the Vallabha Sampradaya, he is said to have begun his pilgrimages all over India at this time. These form a most important part of his life, for they extended over a period of nearly twenty years, in the course of which he went round the whole of Hindustan three times. They are spoken of as *Digvijaya*, missions of spiritual conquest, as much as pilgrimages, undertaken with the definite purpose of preaching and establishing his faith and system of belief. It seems more likely, however, that the latter idea grew with him in the course of years, while he started at first as a pilgrim only. It is also doubtful if Vallabha, even during the last stages of these pilgrimages of his, thought in terms of *Digvijaya*, in the same sense in which Shankaracharya, the first of the Acharyas, is said to have thought and worked. For one thing, Vallabha was too humble a

man to allow the idea of universal conquest, although of a spiritual kind, to take root in his mind. He rarely entered into big controversies except when they were forced on him, which procedure on his part was quite in contrast with that of Shankara or even Ramanuja and Madhva, the two great Vaishnava Acharyas who preceded him.

There is something unusual in Vallabha's undertaking such a pilgrimage at this time of his life, whether he started on it immediately after leaving Benares or a year or two later. Boys of his age with a religious bias have been known to do this in India from times immemorial, but they did it mostly as fugitives from their homes with the definite idea of renouncing the world. They joined one or the other of the bands of Sadhus moving about the country, ultimately finding their spiritual home with some religious teacher whom they accepted as their *Guru*, or joining some sect or other. Many of these became spiritual wrecks, of whom nothing was ever heard in the future. Once in a while, however, a boy who had left his home in this manner attained to an eminent position as a religious teacher.

The most notable instance of this type of boys who ran away from home and became eminent religious leaders in modern times is that of Sri Swami Narayana. He left his people when he was eleven years old, moved about the entire land for seven years, and at last settled down in Kathiawad, where and in all Gujarata he worked for full thirty years as the head of a great religious movement. His is one of the most significant lives among the great men that India produced in modern times. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say that he was by far the greatest man of our times.

Rajarshi Ram Mohan Roy, another great man of the modern period, is also said to have left his home while he was a boy. He wandered about the country for some time, going as far as Tibet even, in search of truth and spiritual adventure. After seeing something of the world in this way, he settled down in life

as a householder. During all this period he was gathering knowledge of various religions and cultures in a way never known before, an attainment which has earned him the reputation of being the founder of the Comparative Study of Religion. He was a religious reformer, who introduced in India the new order of life associated with the advent of the British Government. He founded the Brahma Samaj, which became in course of time under the able leadership of Maharshi Devendra Nath Tagore and Brahmarshi Keshub Chunder Sen, the premier religious reform movement of the country. Rajarshi Ram Mohan was, besides, a pioneer in every kind of activity, social, political, educational etc, because of which he is rightly known as the father of New India.

Swami Dayananda Saraswati, the founder of the Arya Samaj, was another of those boys who left home under the inspiration of a religious idea. He lived in a small village in Kathiawad as a boy and being urged by something great within himself, he bade good-bye to his home and everything dear and near to him, and set out in search of the Truth. After much wandering he found a Guru after his heart, from whom he received the command to lead the people back to the Vedas and restore the glory of the ancient Aryan Culture in the land.

The glory of Hindustan is that even women have been known to seek spiritual adventures of this kind. The most remarkable case among them in the modern period is that of Pundita Ramabai, who was, in many respects, the greatest woman of New India. While she was almost a child, she moved about the whole of Hindustan in the company of her parents for years. When her parents and most of her brothers and sisters passed away, she continued to roam about the country with her sole surviving brother for some time longer. Being gifted with rich talents, she learnt a great deal of the Hindu religion from the Scriptures themselves, especially the Bhagawata Purana. She knew the Samskrit language so well that she was conferred



upon the title of *Pundita* by the learned men of Benares. The most remarkable fact about this is that she had attained this mastery over the classical language while she was tramping about the country all the time. She was forced to give up her wandering life after she had entered into her twenties, when her brother, who was her sole protector, passed away. She then entered into an inter-caste marriage with a Bengali gentleman, who too passed away soon leaving her a widow with an infant daughter. For several years after this event she worked in the Bombay Presidency, to which she belonged by birth, for the cause of the uplift of women. Later on she went to England where she became a Christian. She then proceeded to the United States of America where she lived for some years. On her return to India she started an educational institution for women called Sharda Sadan in co-operation with the late Justice Mahadeva Govinda Ranade and several others. Unfortunately the orthodox society of Poona, where the Sadan was located, showed itself extremely hostile to her under the leadership of the late Bal Gangadhar Tilak, with the result that the Pundita had to carry on her work under serious difficulties. The situation became worse when one or two of the young widows studying in the Sharda Sadan took baptism. This was soon followed by an open rupture between the Pundita and even the reformers who had supported her until then.

Ramabai was then thrown on her own inner resources supplemented by the powerful aid of Christian Missions. Her Christian conviction, which was hitherto lax, grew apace, she experienced a real conversion followed by a re-baptism of herself, and then launched on a new enterprise. This was nothing less than the founding of a new Mission called the Mukti Mission. Its chief purpose was to convert people, especially women and children, to Christianity. About this time in the year 1900 or thereabout, there was a serious famine in India when Ramabai's people went round collecting as many people as they could for the purpose of both saving them from starvation and making them

Christians. She got money by the cart-load from the United States of America for this work, which resulted in her gathering together some five to six thousand souls. She fed and maintained these people for the next twenty-five years, their ranks thinning out in course of time. It is perhaps an underestimate to say that she provided with food, clothing and lodging an average of two thousand people over this long period. Although she had ample money for this work, the management of the entire organisation required extraordinary ability, wisdom and faith in God, all of which she had in a large measure. It was in the showing of these that her real greatness lay.

This was not all. While doing all this work, which was nothing less than herculean in character and scope, she took upon herself the task of translating the whole of the Bible into Marathi. This alone is a piece of work big enough to require the energies of many able-bodied intellectual men for several years, but she did it all entirely by herself. Though this translation of hers has proved a failure, owing mainly to her implacable antagonism to Hinduism, which made her discard even the most ordinary terms in use among the people because of their idolatrous or even religious associations in some way or other, it is a monument of her extraordinary intelligence and industry. She was so much of a literalist that she sacrificed the spirit to the letter in the translation at every point. As a Christian she was a most bigoted one, every word of the Bible being in her eyes the word of God and everything in Hinduism of the Devil almost if not altogether. With these limitations, which were very serious both from the point of view of Hinduism and all true Religion, she was in many respects a remarkable woman. In magnanimity, charity, ability for organisation, purity of character and faith in God, there have been few like her in India in modern times.

We have quoted these examples at length with the sole object of showing that four of the greatest persons in our own

times almost started their life as pilgrims and wanderers in their young days. Dr. Nicol Macnicol, the Scottish biographer of Pundita Ramabai, says that "tramping" of this kind "without any moral scathing" is possible only in India. This is the greatest compliment that could be paid to any country, for it shows as nothing else the prevailing atmosphere of the land. Here are these people called the pilgrims, including boys of tender age and even women, thousands in number, going about the land from one place to another, without any provision made for them, begging their daily bread on the way and finding some rest for the night anywhere. It is a kind of fire which they pass through, and they are not only untouched by it but come out as pure gold. Such a phenomenon is possible only in Hindustan.

The reason for this is that the prevailing passion of the people of the land, the Hindus, has been for centuries the quest for God and Salvation. They have been hungering and thirsting after Religion with the result that God has met them more than half way. They have seen the foot-prints of God in every dale and hill, in the majestic mountains and the great and small rivers of the land. Hindustan, better known to the religious-minded people as Bharat-Khanda, is essentially the Holy Land of the Hindus, in a far truer sense than Palestine has ever been to the Jews and the Christians, or Arabia to the Moslems. No land, in its geography and history, has been so intimately associated with religion. This becomes all the more significant when we realize that this land is more of the size of a continent than a country such as England or France or Arabia. It has been rightly called, on account of this, Bharat-Khanda, which name has signified the religious unity of the land for more than twenty centuries. This continent is honey-combed with holy places, the routes to which have been trodden by millions of people, men and women, in their search after God. There are temples and rest-houses everywhere, and food can be had only for the asking. In innumerable places all along these

high-ways, provision for food has been made for every one who comes seeking his daily bread, it being considered a matter of great merit to open such Sada-Vritas as they are called. Here the roles of donors and beggars are reversed since the former ask the people to come and thereby oblige them by taking their alms.

All these things have made the institution of Pilgrimage a most popular one in India. Possibly hundreds of thousands of people are on the move all the time for this purpose, while there is a large increase in their numbers on special occasions. If the heart of Hindustan throbbed anywhere, it did so in these bands of pilgrims wandering from one Shrine to another in order to have the *darshan*, the sight, of their Deity.

The visiting of the holy places was not the only purpose which some of the pilgrims had in those times when the means of traffic were not so rapid. With them it was a spiritual adventure of the highest kind. They did not care to attain ordinary merit by bathing in a holy river or by paying their homage to a particular image. They left their home for good and set out in search of some Guru, Teacher, who might reveal to them the highest truth and lead them to final Beatitude. It has been a recognised belief with the Hindus that in Bharat-Khanda, there are always some men of God, Saints and Devotees, who have the knowledge of God and are thus the way to find Him. They are holier than the holy places, visible gods on earth, at once sanctified and sanctifying. Whosoever seeks them is sure to find them and with this the goal of life is reached.

To go on a pilgrimage has been thus a kind of national instinct with the Hindus operating powerfully even in our own times. It was much more so in medieval times, and Vallabha, boy as he was, obeyed it when he left home to go round Bharat-Khanda. The urge was greater in him because he was a religious genius, God leading him for purposes of His own. What was unusual about his leaving home in this way at this early period in



his life is the fact that he did it with the full consent of his mother and family. This was possible only if they were sure that he was an extraordinary boy who had already given incontrovertible proofs of his divine calling and mission in life, for to go round India in this manner was running a serious risk at every step in those days of political turmoil.

Very likely there was another urge, probably a minor one, in Vallabha's going to South India at this time. The northern part of India then was under the domination of the Moslems, in consequence of which there was a kind of chaos in both the political and the religious life of the people there. In contrast to this South India was comparatively much freer from disturbances and upheavals of any kind. A large part of it was ruled by the powerful Kingdom of Vijayanagar, which was then a kind of small Hindu Empire in itself. Besides, ever since the time of Shankara, South India had assumed the religious leadership of the whole of India, giving rise to a number of Acharyas such as Ramanuja, Bhaskara, Nimbarka and Madhva. It was, besides, the home of Vaishnavism, which may have been another source of attraction to Vallabha, if he had at this time formulated his religious convictions in a definite form.

It was no wonder, then, if in view of all this and much more, Vallabha felt a call to go to the South after the death of his father. It was essential for his own education that he should go there and visit all the great shrines of the various Vaishnava Sampradayas. He must have felt also a keen desire to see and know in person the leading men of these bodies. South India has been known long since as the land which gave birth to Bhakti and from where the springs of devotion flowed northwards. It is said in the Padma Purana that Bhakti had its birth in the land of the Dravidas, its youthfulness in Karnatic and Maharashtra and its old age in Gujarata. It was natural, therefore, that Vallabha should feel himself called to visit this part of Bharat-Khanda first.

## CHAPTER III

### **The Family Returns to South India**

Vallabha is said to have passed the next fifteen years of his life in these pilgrimages, going round the whole of Bharat-Khanda three times. In many respects this formed the best part of his education. He had very little of regular schooling as we have already seen. This was hardly enough to serve as a basis for his Mission as an Acharya as it grew in course of time. It seems that now he wanted to educate himself by this process, or rather he was led by something within him that was too great to be resisted. He was serving his apprenticeship in this way and the idea of his life-work was growing with him all the time. While he started as a pilgrim pure and simple in his first round, he became almost a renowned preacher of a new Way of Life in his third. The most remarkable thing about him is that the idea of the whole of his Mission grew from within himself, a matter in which he differs from even such great teachers as Shankara and Ramanuja. He had no Guru or Teacher, nor any kind of affiliation with a sect or a Church.

Unfortunately we have no definite accounts of these pilgrimages of Vallabha. Whatever there are vary a great deal in matters of detail. One of them, for example, says that he took eighteen years in all to finish these three rounds of his. Another says that he took nine years to finish his first round. There is, besides, much mixing up of dates and incidents, which makes it extremely difficult to find the thread of real history. This is

but too evident from the date which is assigned to what is known as *Kanakabhisheka*, the anointing of Vallabha as an Acharya with presents of large amounts of gold. This is the most outstanding event of his career as a pilgrim. It is usually assigned to the first round by all the traditional accounts, but there is no doubt that it belongs to a later period. The same uncertainty is found attending many of the events that are said to have taken place in the course of these three rounds.

Under these circumstances all that we can do here is to draw a rough outline of these pilgrimages, or rather give a composite picture showing some of the high lights thereof. Such a picture will, besides, furnish us with some idea of what we may call the religious geography of India. Almost all the important, attractive and exceptional aspects of the land are sanctified by being related to some myth or actual history in the life of one or another of the many incarnations of God or some saint. This makes the entire country breathe forth a spirit of religion in a way that is true of no other land.

To begin with, Vallabha is said to have left Benares with two or three men, who were probably the servants of the family or stood to him in the relationship of disciples, to visit some shrines on the way to the south. At the same time, his mother with his brothers and sisters left for Gaya for the purpose of performing the *Shradhdha* ceremony of his father. The two parties that separated themselves in this manner were to meet later on in the course of their journey as arranged beforehand. That Vallabha did not go to Gaya in order to take part in this ceremony is surprising, and can be understood only on the ground that he had already taken a vow to go the round of Bharat-Khand for the purpose of pilgrimage. He was now a Pilgrim in earnest, which probably absolved him from domestic and social obligations. The manner of life of Vallabha at this stage was that of a *Brahmachari*, which he kept up all through the period. He



went on foot, besides, from one place to another as befitted a true pilgrim.

The first place visited by Vallabha and his party in this way was Chitrakuta, a place associated with the sacred memory of Sri Ramchandra and since then with that of the poet-saint Tulsidas. From here they proceeded to Champaranya, the birth-place of Vallabha, where they stayed for a few days, passing their time in the study of the Bhagawata Purana. It was here that the mother of Vallabha with her party joined him, and they all proceeded further south together.

The next important place they all came to was Mt. Amarakantaka, a hill of about 3500 ft. in height, belonging to the Satpura range. There is close by a beautiful fall of the river Narmada which springs from these mountains. The region abounds in fine natural scenery, which was perhaps the origin of its sanctity. There are a number of temples round about, the presiding Deity of the place being Shiva, the great God of the Himalayas. Here He is known by the name of Amarkanteshwara and the party offered Him their devotion and worship. Incidentally it is interesting to observe that Vallabha never looked askance at Shiva in these pilgrimages and even after, a matter in which he differed from some of his great predecessors, especially Madhva. To him Shiva was a god, a great god, though subsidiary to Vishnu, whose follower and devotee he was

They all proceeded from there to Siddhipada, where, it is said, a learned and famous Brahmin called Saryeshwara, belonging to Madhva Sampradaya, came to him and became his disciple. From here they went to Vridhinagar, which was in all probability the same place as Wardha. This is the place associated in the Sampradaya of Vallabha with the memory of a most important event in his life as well as that of his Church. It was here that he secured his first disciple Damodardas. The latter was a youth at

this time, only about five years older than his master. The very first sight of Vallabha was enough to act as a powerful spell on him, so much so that he left his all, family, home and everything, and attached himself to Vallabha for good. He remained with Vallabha till the end of the latter's life, surviving him by some years. He thus shared with Vallabha all his thoughts and aspirations, his trials and troubles and served him to the best of his ability in all things. As a result of this faith of his in his Master and his perfect and willing obedience to him in all things, he became, so to say, the rock on which Vallabha built his Church. He was the person to whom the initiation into the new faith was first given, and the crown of his devotion and service to Vallabha was attained by him when his Master told him : "Damla, it is for your sake that I have revealed this way." A greater reward than this it is difficult to imagine, making the statement and all that lies behind it unique in the history of religion. It is, besides, in perfect keeping with the Path of Grace which it was the special Mission of Vallabha to preach. Here was a man who had no talents of any kind, and whose chief and sole virtues were simplicity of heart and soul and a singular devotion to his master. Humility, which is the foremost of all the virtues in the faith of Vallabha, was typified in him to such an extent that he may well be called an incarnation thereof. There is something in him which reminds one of Hanuman, the great servant and devotee of Sri Ramchandra. It may well be that the peculiar relationship in which he stood to Vallabha had some share in the origin and the evolution of the Path of Grace which Vallabha came to preach in course of time. It is in the fitness of things that Damodardas stands at the head of all the disciples of Vallabha and the first to be mentioned among the saints of the new Church. If it be true that Vallabha secured him as his disciple in the beginning of his first tour round India, it shows that he had already attained his spiritual majority at a time when he was hardly eleven or twelve years old.

went on foot, besides, from one place to another as befitted a true pilgrim.

The first place visited by Vallabha and his party in this way was Chitrakuta, a place associated with the sacred memory of Sri Ramchandra and since then with that of the poet-saint Tulsidas. From here they proceeded to Champaranya, the birth-place of Vallabha, where they stayed for a few days, passing their time in the study of the Bhagawata Purana. It was here that the mother of Vallabha with her party joined him, and they all proceeded further south together.

The next important place they all came to was Mt. Amarakantaka, a hill of about 3500 ft. in height, belonging to the Satpura range. There is close by a beautiful fall of the river Narmada which springs from these mountains. The region abounds in fine natural scenery, which was perhaps the origin of its sanctity. There are a number of temples round about, the presiding Deity of the place being Shiva, the great God of the Himalayas. Here He is known by the name of Amarkanteshwara and the party offered Him their devotion and worship. Incidentally it is interesting to observe that Vallabha never looked askance at Shiva in these pilgrimages and even after, a matter in which he differed from some of his great predecessors, especially Madhva. To him Shiva was a god, a great god, though subsidiary to Vishnu, whose follower and devotee he was.

They all proceeded from there to Siddhipada, where, it is said, a learned and famous Brahmin called Saryeshwara, belonging to Madhva Sampradaya, came to him and became his disciple. From here they went to Vridhinagar, which was in all probability the same place as Wardha. This is the place associated in the Sampradaya of Vallabha with the memory of a most important event in his life as well as that of his Church. It was here that he secured his first disciple Damodardas. The latter was a youth at

this time, only about five years older than his master. The very first sight of Vallabha was enough to act as a powerful spell on him, so much so that he left his all, family, home and everything, and attached himself to Vallabha for good. He remained with Vallabha till the end of the latter's life, surviving him by some years. He thus shared with Vallabha all his thoughts and aspirations, his trials and troubles and served him to the best of his ability in all things. As a result of this faith of his in his Master and his perfect and willing obedience to him in all things, he became, so to say, the rock on which Vallabha built his Church. He was the person to whom the initiation into the new faith was first given, and the crown of his devotion and service to Vallabha was attained by him when his Master told him : "Damla, it is for your sake that I have revealed this way." A greater reward than this it is difficult to imagine, making the statement and all that lies behind it unique in the history of religion. It is, besides, in perfect keeping with the Path of Grace which it was the special Mission of Vallabha to preach. Here was a man who had no talents of any kind, and whose chief and sole virtues were simplicity of heart and soul and a singular devotion to his master. Humility, which is the foremost of all the virtues in the faith of Vallabha, was typified in him to such an extent that he may well be called an incarnation thereof. There is something in him which reminds one of Hanuman, the great servant and devotee of Sri Ramchandra. It may well be that the peculiar relationship in which he stood to Vallabha had some share in the origin and the evolution of the Path of Grace which Vallabha came to preach in course of time. It is in the fitness of things that Damodardas stands at the head of all the disciples of Vallabha and the first to be mentioned among the saints of the new Church. If it be true that Vallabha secured him as his disciple in the beginning of his first tour round India, it shows that he had already attained his spiritual majority at a time when he was hardly eleven or twelve years old.

From Wardha the party proceeded onward, making an important halt of some days at a place called Agrahara. Vallabha's uncle, a man called Janardana, lived here. The re-union of the family was a happy occasion for all of them, especially after the death of Vallabha's father. The uncle was highly gratified to see his nephew growing in spiritual and intellectual life in the way he did with the promise of a great career before him. It is said that many learned people of the place came to see Vallabha, hearing of his extraordinary attainments. Very likely the mother of Vallabha with her other children had thought of settling down in this place under the guardianship of Janardana, but an invitation came from her brother who was holding a high place in Vijayanagara for the family to go there. Accordingly after a stay of some time they all started again on their journey southwards

On their way they visited a place called Vyankatesha associated with the memory of Sri Ramchandra. Here at the foot of the hills is a temple of Rama with another on one of the highest of the hills called after Sri Laxmana Balaji. They had their *darshan* of the Deities in both the temples. While here Vallabha's mother had a dream in which she saw her late husband entering the mouth of the Image of Balajee, which signified the attainment of the Final Beatitude by the deceased. This gave all of them much consolation and peace of mind, since the purpose with which the mother had set out for Gaya was now fulfilled.

From here the party proceeded to Vijayanagara.



## CHAPTER IV

### **The Kingdom of Vijayanagara**

At the time we are speaking of, Vijayanagara or Vidyanagara, was the most important Hindu Kingdom all over India. The glory of Hinduism had been more or less obscured, perhaps for centuries, in the north owing to the advent of the Moslems. Several Moslem dynasties had ruled over a large part of territory round about Delhi, assuming the position of the sovereign power for nearly five centuries. This had left its impress on the whole of North India, together with Gujarata in the East and Bengal in the West, both of which provinces had come to be conquered and subdued by the Moslems some time since. Happily the Moslems had not yet penetrated to the South leaving thus the religious, social and cultural life thereof unaffected in any way. Because of this Hinduism was found in its pristine purity there, Vijayanagara being its chief stronghold.

The Kingdom of Vijayanagara was a kind of small Empire in itself, for its rule extended all over South India and many smaller States acknowledged its suzerainty. Because of this it was an eyesore to the neighbouring Moslem States, all of which combined together for the purpose of waging a war against it. They had at first serious reverses, but they ultimately succeeded in destroying it in 1565 A. D. The vandalism practised by the Moslems at this time was so great that it may well be compared with that of the Romans in their destruction of Carthage.



far were the followers of Madhva led by a man called Dandi Acharya and some of the followers of Shankar. The former were supported in this by some of the members of other Vaishnava Sampradayas (churches). Vallabha now came to the aid of the latter, the discussions lasted for several days more and they ended in a victory for him.

As a result of this victory, King Krishnadeva thought it proper to crown Vallabha as the chief religious leader of the country. This ceremony is known as *Kanakabhisheka* and has been given much importance to by the followers of Vallabha. Grand preparations were made for the purpose, a magnificent court was held attended by all the officers, important citizens and large crowds of people, and in the midst of all of them Vallabha was anointed with proper ceremonies as an Acharya. Krishnadeva gave him much gold and money together with all the vessels made of gold and silver used in the performance of the ceremony. Vallabha true to his vow of poverty as a Brahmachari, requested the king to distribute all this to poor Brahmins and others

This anointing is invested with much glory in the literature of the Church of Vallabha and is considered a land-mark in his life. His position as an Acharya, i. e. accredited religious teacher of the first rank, is said to have been established by this ceremony. But the account as it is teems with a number of chronological and other difficulties which are not easy to solve. Because of this it has been seriously challenged by a number of scholars of Vallabha's own Church, many of whom now place it at a later stage in Vallabha's life. There are critics who deny it altogether.

The record as it stands is hard to believe, for at the time we are speaking of, Vallabha was a boy of hardly eleven or twelve years old, and humanly speaking it is not easy for men, not endowed with extraordinary supernatural powers, to attain the kind of triumph mentioned here. Granting that Vallabha had such

powers, his later life would show many more victories of this kind and even greater, but there is no record of such. The triumphs of Vallabha in the days of his manhood, are entirely of a different and to our mind of a higher order, because they are those of humility, love, devotion etc. He was great because he was humble, simple, sincere and devout. The very faith that he preached recognises no other greatness than this.

A more serious difficulty confronting us in the matter of the anointing of Vallabha at this period in his life, lies in the fact that Krishnadeva came to the throne of Vijayanagara in 1509 A. D., whereas Vallabha came to that city in 1493-94. This makes a gap of nearly fifteen years which it is difficult to bridge. As against this, it may be said that Krishnadeva, though not the king in name, was one for all practical purposes. His step-brother, Vira Narsimha, had ascended the throne in 1490-91, but as he was a man without any force of character, Krishnadeva ruled the State. There was much intrigue in consequence of this at the court, all which would hardly leave much time for him to take part in such religious discussions and ceremonies, especially in the beginning of his brother's career as a ruler. He could have done these things only when his own position was firmly established, or more properly when he was the king in his own right. It would seem from this that this *Kanakabhisheka*, if it took place at all, belongs to a later stage of Vallabha's life.

This anointing is associated in the Sampradayic literature in point of time and place with another event of great significance in the life of Vallabha. It is said that soon after the *Kanakabhisheka*, Vallabha was visited by Bilvamangala. This is a semi-mythological person, his story being full of supernatural elements. He is said to have been one of the leaders of the Vaishnava Church founded by Vishnu Swami, who was kept in the world for some hundreds of years for the sole purpose of handing over the sacred charge of the propagation of that faith to Vallabha. As we have dealt with

Vishnu Swami elsewhere in the present work, there is no need to speak of him here. Suffice it for our present purpose to say that he was one of the Acharyas of the Bhagavata-Dharma, though his period and history are shrouded in much obscurity. Bilvamangala is connected with his movement and is said to have lived a hidden life in Vrandavana waiting for the advent of Vallabha. Now that the latter had appeared and manifested his powers, Bilvamangala entrusted him with the sacred Mission of propagating the Bhakti-Marga in a new form. This tradition affiliates thus the movement of Vallabha to that of Vishnu Swami, giving him a direct succession to the latter through the mysterious initiation administered to him by Bilvamangala.

This account also is full of difficulties of its own. Apart from the mystery of Bilvamangala's extraordinarily long life, the impossibility of the thing lies in the fact that Vallabha nowhere in his writings mentions either him or Vishnu Swami as his spiritual fathers. In one or two places he has actually criticised the teaching of Vishnu Swami as defective. His position is that his own faith is a matter of special revelation to him from God. Some of his followers also have repudiated any close connection between his Church and that of Vishnu Swami. In all probability the origin of this tradition lay in the desire of some of the early followers of Vallabha to find some kind of spiritual succession for their Church.

Whatever be the facts concerning the Kanakabhisheka and the visit of Bilvamangala to Vallabha, there seems to be no doubt that the latter's coming to Vijayanagara at this time was something of a land-mark in his life. In all probability he made a long stay in this city, extending over a year or two perhaps. Now that his father was no more, Vijayanagara was his real home. The city was, moreover, one of the greatest centres of Hindu learning and far more Vaishnavite in character than Benares. This phase of its life was sure to be a source of much attraction to Vallabha.

His uncle was a man of position and influence, which made things easier for him in getting him the best of contacts with the leaders of thought in the place. In spite of all his education in Benares, he had still much to learn, and there were few places in India which could help in the growth of his genius so much as Vijayanagara.

All these circumstances lead us to infer that Vallabha made a pretty long stay here, probably of a year or two, during which time he studied more carefully the various schools of thought, especially those of Vaishnavism. He had a far better chance of doing it in Vijayanagara than at Benares. In addition to this he must have come across a number of scholars and leaders of thought visiting the city from all parts of India, some seeking patronage of the State while others may have come with the mission of propagating their respective faiths. The city must be humming with intellectual and religious activities of all sorts, which was just the thing necessary for stimulating so highly gifted and spiritually-minded a young man or boy as Vallabha was. He must have been a silent but most interested spectator of many a controversy between the leaders of various sects and schools of thought, and new light must have flashed to him from the sharp conflict of their intellects. His was an original mind and he came gradually to form convictions of his own. It is likely that of the different Vaishnava systems of thought and practice, that of Vishnu Swami may have appealed to him at this time more than others, leading him even to seek affiliation with it. If this was the case, it was so only for a very short period. Some such thing alone can explain the persistent tradition in his Church of his spiritual connection with Vishnu Swami and Bilvamangala.

It is said that after the Kanakabhisheka Vallabha was requested by the leaders of the Church of Madhva to be their chief Acharya. There is no doubt that this Sampradaya was powerful in Vijayanagara at this time, some of the members of the royal family itself belonging to it. In the controversy



spoken of, it was this Church which led the opposition against the Mayavada of Shankar. In all probability it aimed at being the official Church of the State. This must have given ample opportunities to Vallabha to study the Vaishnavism of Madhva in as intimate a manner as possible. The dualistic philosophy of the latter which stood in the sharpest of antagonism to the teaching of Shankar, exercised such a deep influence on the mind of Chaitanya, that he adopted it wholesale. His debt to Madhva's Vaishnavism was not confined merely to its philosophy, for he took even his initiation at the hands of a Sannyasi of that faith. This reflects no small credit on Madhvaism and shows its great vitality at this time. It is not unlikely, therefore, that it may have helped Vallabha, who was a contemporary of Chaitanya, in some way at this stage of his life. Here in Vijayanagara he had seen it in much of its strength and glory, and as a most powerful opponent of Shankar's system of philosophy, which he had in all probability begun to look upon as untrue to the Vedic Scriptures. Though he did not accept this faith, or its philosophy, he seems to have been well disposed towards it all his life. In this connection it is worthy of note that the only man who played an important part in the life of Vallabha as a kind of spiritual help and friend, if not as a Guru, was Madhavendra Yati, who belonged to Madhva's Church. This was the man who is said to have taught Vallabha Sri Bhagwata Purana in his early boyhood in Benares sowing thus in him the seeds of Bhakti. There is not much truth probably in this tradition, but there is no doubt that Madhavendra Yati had much to do with the establishment of the shrine of Sri Govardhannathjee at Mt. Govardhana. This was an event of great significance for Vallabha and his movement, for it served as a kind of foundation for his own Church. Again later on when Vallabha wanted to take Sannyasa at the end of his life, it was Madhavendra who gave him the ordination. This is enough to show Vallabha's friendly attitude towards Madhvaism, and the beginning of it may well have been made in Vijayanagara at this time.

Altogether Vallabha's stay in Vijayanagara, whatever be its length and history, was exceedingly helpful to the growth of his mind and spirit. He was there in the most impressionable stage of his life, and the glory of Hinduism in general and Vaishnavism in particular, as it was reflected in the religious, social and political life in this city, could not but affect him in the deepest manner. It was in all probability here that his genius flowered and he came to dream dreams and see visions of his future life and work.



## CHAPTER V

### **Vallabha starts on his pilgrimage**

Vallabha's pilgrimage began in earnest after his stay in Vijayanagara as mentioned before. What had been done hitherto by him was more or less preliminary to this his real pilgrimage. Until now his mother, brothers and sisters were with him, and he had to bring them all from Benares. Now that this was done and they had been well settled under the protecting care of his uncle, and that he had grown a little older and more mature in every way, he thought it proper to start on his great venture. This was nothing less than going round the whole of Bharata-Khanda. The most remarkable thing in connection with this pilgrimage of his is that he was allowed by his mother and uncle to take to a course of life that was attended by innumerable risks at this tender age. They could not have done this if they had not been assured in their mind that he was something of a religious genius, who was destined to do great things in course of time. To us these seem to be the first great testimony to the divine mission of his life.

Accordingly, Vallabha started with three or four companions for the holy places further south. The party walked on foot as true pilgrims should, carrying whatever few things were necessary for their daily needs. Their daily programme was to rise early in the morning, go through their ablutions and prayers, and then to start on their journey. They walked for about three or four hours, and made a halt in some suitable place such as a forest, or a

village, or on a river-bank. Here they cooked their daily meal, and after partaking of it took rest in the afternoon. The whole of the evening was passed in the reading of the Bhagwata-Purana, Vallabha himself being the reader. When they came to some holy place, they made a stay there, which was long or short according as it suited them or to the sanctity and importance of the place.

The first place of this kind which the party came to was Pampa Sarovara. This lake is associated with the memory of Ramchandra, who is said to have halted here on his journey southward. Vallabha and his companions stayed here for three days. It was a practice of theirs to try to understand the origin and significance of each place of pilgrimage with the idea of assimilating the spiritual meaning thereof in their own life as much as possible. In the traditional accounts Vallabha is said to have taught the spiritual significance of each place to his companions, who stood to him as disciples. The origin and history of the place were thus recalled in a reverent spirit, which made the pilgrimage a kind of veritable communion with the saints and incarnations of the past. The pilgrims transcended thus both time and space and lived in a spiritual world glowing with ideal values.

These pilgrimages, apart from the spiritual significance that was inherent in them, offered to the persons who made them the best of education. Their cultural value was as great as the religious one. They taught, to begin with, geography as no school ever could. The same was the case with history to an almost equal extent. It has been said that the Hindus have lacked the historical sense, a charge which is not without foundation when they are compared with the Greeks. It is true, however, to a limited extent. The truth of the matter is that the real history of the Hindus does not lie in the secular realm so much as in the spiritual, and this is not merely written but ploughed in the innumerable places of pilgrimage scattered all over the land. From

the time of Gautama Buddha, if not earlier, they have been the living monuments of what has counted the most in the life of the people. Lives of Kings and Emperors, which have been so far the subject of most histories, were things of little moment to the Hindus all along. Only those things and events which had spiritual significance and as such were of abiding value they took note of as constituting true history. The essence of all history was in them and it was preserved in these places.

One acquired, besides, while going over these sacred places, much valuable knowledge concerning the customs and manners of different people residing in different provinces. One great feature of the continent known as Hindustan is that while it has had all these centuries a religious and cultural unity greater than what Europe ever had in the best days of its unity under the Roman Catholic Church, it is far richer in variety in a number of social and other aspects of life than any other country of its size. This constitutes the peculiar glory and charm of the country in the eyes of foreign visitors from times immemorial. While the distribution of this variety lies mostly along geographical lines, a number of characteristics belonging to the different races inhabiting the various parts of this land are far from obliterated thus adding to the variety of life in each province. Not only do these races differ from one another in many customs and manners but even groups within the same race have different sets of customs.

Some of this rich variety is passing away to-day under the stress of what we call modern civilization, which is based on machine and which is bringing along with it universal mechanisation and standardisation of life. But as late as fifty years ago it was easy to recognise a man's caste by the dress he wore and his manner and bearing. His province or district could be recognised by his head-dress, which changed, though ever so little, at a distance of twenty or thirty miles. The same was true in regard to the language he spoke. All this was true to a far larger extent

at the time of Vallabha, and gave people ample opportunities for observation and study. Means of traffic were then incomparably slow, a matter which helped much in the process of this study. The place of travel in modern education was then taken by pilgrimage, which had this in addition, viz, that it did not cultivate only the mind but the heart and soul as well. In this respect it gave a much better education than mere travel ever could.

We have already mentioned the great religious and cultural unity of Hindustan. All the variety we have mentioned above was no bar to it. The socio-religious structure of Hindu life known as the caste-system or better still the Varnashrama-Dharma bound the various races and groups together in a unity, which has been one of the most remarkable features not only of Indian life but of civilization in general. It is a marvel of human organization. Western writers and authors including Roman Catholic missionaries were full of praise for it when they first came to India. Abbe Du Bois, a Catholic missionary, in his *Hindu Customs and Manners* spoke of it as the *chef d'oeuvre*, master-piece of Hindu legislators. Similar things were said about it by a number of Englishmen. This attitude was changed at the instance of missionaries who came to realize in course of time that it was this system which exercised the greatest resisting power against their proselytizing activities. It constituted the real nationalism of the Hindus, against which the forces of both Islam and Christianity, the two most imperialistic religions of the world, beat themselves in vain for centuries. It was imperfect in some ways, which was due to the fact that no human organization could be perfect. Whatever be its limitations, however, it has served a great purpose in the economy of human life in general and Hindu life in particular for centuries. It is largely due to it that the Hindu Culture and Civilization, one of the most remarkable phenomena of the history of mankind, have become possible.

The religious, cultural and social unity embodied in this System or Dharma was emphasized and supplemented by the large number of places of pilgrimage scattered all over the land. Every big centre of this kind such as Benares, Haridwara, Jagannatha Puri etc, was a miniature Bharatkhanda in itself, for one could see there people from all provinces and communities and castes living together as one family almost. These sacred places served as links binding together different parts of India in indissoluble bonds of religious and cultural fellowship. They were even more than that, for the very soul of Bharatkhanda was expressed therein as nowhere else. The numerous bands of pilgrims moving constantly to and fro were the best representatives of this soul, and they became unconsciously even the missionaries thereof. They were as if it were the arteries through which coursed the very life-blood of Hinduism, which is but another name of Hindu religious and cultural unity. This was true of all pilgrims, whether Sadhus or laymen, men or women. All of them returned invariably after a course of pilgrimage with larger ideas of life and culture, which were not less vital for being tinged with the spirit of other-worldliness. Even the most ordinary people, men and women belonging to the laity, were looked up to for their larger outlook on life after a visit to only a few such places. The present writer well remembers how, in his early boyhood about half a century back, people hung about the lips of such pilgrims as they related the various incidents and experiences of their travels in the course of their pilgrimage. They embodied in themselves the idea of Hinduism to a far larger extent than other people and became the preachers thereof.

Many of these places of pilgrimage are noted for their temples full of architectural beauty. The best of Hindu art is centred in these shrines, and to visit only a few of them with the feeling of that deep veneration which every pilgrim has, leads necessarily to an elevation of heart and soul. Then again, the natural beauty that surrounds most of such places, some of it of



an extraordinary kind, invariably leaves a permanent mark for good upon every sensitive soul.

One came across, besides, in these holy places religious men of all kinds, ascetics, sages, yogis, and saints. Some of them were noted far and wide, and to visit them was a part of the pilgrimage itself. Some may have a local reputation only, but this does not necessarily mean that they were less important. To find such jewels was to some the best part of the pilgrimage. In the eyes of these, the spirit of God embodied in living human beings was a source of far greater attraction than all the holy places in the world.

We have drawn so far only one side of the picture of holy places. There is another side to it which needs to be mentioned. While God was there in perhaps a larger measure than elsewhere, the Devil too was not absent. Some of these places, especially the big ones, were notoriously evil, for priest-craft, pride of caste, sectarianism, hypocrisy, covetousness and even lust had all massed themselves together there as nowhere else. To see God in the shrines in spite of all this required a power of faith, which happily abounded in most pilgrims. It may be that it was this faith which kept up the sanctity of the places. The purpose with which the pilgrims went made them blind to these things, giving them an eye only for the bright side. The heroic souls among them, on the other hand, were made furious by the evil found therein, and they resolved to remedy it. They became the reformers of Hinduism.

To return to our story, Vallabha spent nearly two decades in his pilgrimages, and to an inquisitive and original man like him, this served as the best of education. He was perhaps the only one among the great Acharyas to pass so much time in this manner, travelling constantly from one place to another and thus learning as much of Truth as possible objectively. He came out of this long process of education a finished man. His inner



resources must have been great indeed for him to achieve so remarkable a result. In the course of these travels of his, he affiliated himself to no school of thought or sect, made no one his *Guru* or Teacher, and stayed in no place for long. This shows for one thing the great independence of his mind and soul, and the keenness of the spirit of adventure in him. Nothing else could have made him undergo the immense strain of such constant travel. This was his *Tapas*, austerity, imposed on himself for the purpose of realising Truth and Reality, and his going through this fire not only purified him but made him a man of pure gold.

As we have said before, Vallabha and his party came to Pampa Sarovara. It was here that Sri Ram Chandra is said to have shown mercy to Savri, a woman who belonged to the lowest status of life. He did this by coming down to her level in the act of eating the berries which she offered to him after tasting them all to know whether they were ripe. He did this because her love was great. The story thus preaches the doctrine of divine grace which transcends the bounds of race and sex, and shows the disinterested love of a simple human heart as more important in the eyes of God than the severest kind of asceticism, or penance, or ritual sacrifice, or even knowledge. There was perhaps some hidden significance in the fact that this place was the first visited by Vallabha in the course of his pilgrimage, for no teacher has preached the doctrine of divine grace so consistently and emphatically as he has done. His visit to this place has been commemorated by his followers since his time in the shape of a monument. This is a kind of platform roofed over and is known as *Bethaka* in the literature of his Church.

From here the party went to Mt. Rishyamuka, Kumarpada, Sri Shaila, Tripati etc., etc. In some of these places, Vallabha came across various Yogis, Pundits etc. Some of them challenged him to enter into a controversy with them or tried to browbeat him into

submission Vallabha, however, came out of all these intellectual and moral contests successfully and with ease. He was rarely militant at this stage of his life and tried to meet his opponents as far as possible on a sort of common ground. He had a definite belief of his own, but he respected the beliefs of others, Vaishnavas especially. Even in Shaivism and some of the minor forms of belief, he saw only variations of the Bhagvata-Dharma. He was something of an eclectic, albeit on the basis of Theism.

Some of the most important experiences which Vallabha had during the course of his pilgrimage in the South were those which resulted from his contacts with the followers of the various Vaishnava sects. In the part of the country he was visiting now, the Church of Ramanuja was powerful, and Vallabha was bound to see its glory and strength. He saw several important leaders of this Church and had much fellowship and communion with them. One such man is especially mentioned, of the name Parmananda-charya, whom he met in Premdhuri, also known as Bhutigram, the birth-place of Sri Ramanuja.

Two of the most important places which Vallabha visited on his southward march were Conjeevaram and Kumbhakonam. The first of these is divided into two parts called Vishnu-Kanchi and Shiva-Kanchi, making it thus a centre of worship for both the Vaishnavas and the Shaivites. Both these people have been often at loggerheads all over India, but they have remained at peace here, each worshipping its own God peacefully and quietly in its section of the city. Vallabha is said to have come across some important Vaishnava scholars, with whom he had some discussion at first relating to some of the doctrines of the Vaishnava faith. Kumbhakonam also is a centre of worship of both Vishnu and Shiva.

Vallabha proceeded from here to Mannargudi, which is known as the Dwarka of the South. This place is a Vaishnava

centre dedicated to the worship of Krishna, which made it very attractive to Vallabha. He is said to have had much religious fellowship with the leaders of the place. He then went to another place which is known as the Ayodhya of the South and is a centre of Rama-worship.

It is interesting to observe how some of these places in South India are named after those in North India. This is especially so in regard to the places of pilgrimage. It seems that as the Aryans went southward, they found it necessary for the deepening of their religious and cultural life to reproduce the atmosphere that prevailed in North India, just as the Pilgrim Fathers did on their arrival to the United States of America.

One of the most important shrines which Vallabha visited now was Sri Rangajee, the great temple in which Narayana is worshipped. This is one of the biggest temples in the whole of India, noted for its size, structure and sanctity. It is the chief shrine of Sri Vaishnavism showing well the power and influence it had been able to secure in the Hindu community in the South. Vallabha is said to have stayed here eight days, during which time he came to know a number of scholars and leaders of the Ramanuja Sampradaya. One of these, Raghavacharya, is specially mentioned as the person with whom Vallabha had several important discussions. The latter is said to have made his own philosophical position clear to him, distinguishing thus his own belief from that of the great Acharya Ramanuja. In any case Vallabha could not but be impressed immensely by what he saw in this shrine.

Vallabha then visited Madura, or Mathura of the south and another place known as the Kashi (Benares) of South India. Going further down he came to Rameshawara, which is situated on the shore of the sea in the southernmost part of Bharatkhandā. This is a Shaivite centre and was then in possession of Vira-Shaivas,

a body of militant followers of Shiva. They demanded from Vallabha submission and conformity to their faith, and failing in their attempt to exact this from him they attacked him and his party. The latter are said to have fought with them in self-defence with the result that the Shaivite party fled away. This was the only unfortunate experience which Vallabha had in the course of all his pilgrimages. He then finished his tour in the south by visiting a few more places.

## CHAPTER VI

### **Vallabha's Return to Vijayanagar**

Vallabha now returned northwards. The first place he is said to have visited was Sri Vaikuntha Kshetra. In this place there is a temple of Sri Narayana, which made him feel at home because of its Vaishnava atmosphere. He had a long talk with one of the leaders of the place, a talk in which he made his religious position clear.

The next important place he visited was Alwal, another Vaishnava centre. This town is associated with the sacred memories of both Sri Ramanuja and Shathakopa, two of the greatest men in the history of Vaishnavism. Vallabha learnt here much of the history of Sri Vaishnavism from one of the leading men of the place. In the story of Shathakopa not only does Vaishnavism transcend the bounds of race and caste, but it owes its very life and rise to one who was a Shudra.

Shathakopa was a true devotee of God who lived a life of constant contemplation of the Supreme Person. It was his usual practice to sit under a Bakul tree for this purpose, which had earned him the nickname of Bakulavarana. One day some Brahmin priests, repeating the Vedic texts while walking along the road where he was sitting, suddenly stopped in their Vedic chant. When they tried to chant again after leaving the place, they could not do so. Somehow or other the texts would not come to their mind. They were much alarmed at this and came

to know that the confusion was due to their having insulted Shathakopa. They then returned to him and begged his pardon, which the latter willingly gave. The Brahmins now could chant again their *Mantras* properly. This was a kind of miracle which gave Shathakopa much prestige even among the twice-born.

Shathakopa seems to have been a man of some learning, for he brought together the essence of the Vedas and the Puranas in a book called *Prabandha* in his vernacular. This book is held in much veneration by the people of the South, and it has a place almost equal to the Vedas.

In course of time Shathakopa passed away. The tradition says that instead of suffering from death as usual, he was translated to heaven while living and that Narayana gave him a seat by His side. It also says that after some thousands of years he returned to the world at the bidding of Narayana for the purpose of teaching the *Bhakti-Marga*. He found a worthy disciple in Nathamuni and gave him his teaching. This was then handed down in succession to Rama Muni, Purna Muni, Yam Muni and from the last to Sri Ramanuja.

In this story of Shathakopa, there is a new Gospel, a new Revelation and Dispensation of Gods' grace so far as the development of Hinduism is concerned. The Bhagavata-Dharma, the religion of God's redemptive grace, could hardly manifest itself better than in this way. Here we have a religious revolution of a radical kind, especially in view of the predominance of the Brahmins in the Vedic Dharma. The succession from Shathakopa to Ramanuja, who is the first great Acharya of Vaishnavism, is in itself a fact which is unique in the religious history of India. It gave a death-blow to the hierarchy of the Caste-system as having any religious significance, and if that system remained in force any longer among the Vaishnavas, it was more in its social and secular aspects than anything else. Henceforth, Hinduism, in



one of its most important phases, became a purely spiritual religion, free from any racial bonds. For Vallabha, to have visited this place and to have known the story of Shathakopa, was indeed a matter of profound importance. The Gospel of God's grace that he was to preach later on with such power, could not have been embodied better than in the life of Shathakopa.

Vallabha visited several other places in this neighbourhood, most of them belonging to Sri Vaishnavism. One of these was Totradi, the chief seat of this Church. In this region there are several important temples, all of Sri Narayana in different positions. Vallabha was sure to find here an atmosphere full of deep piety. It was, besides, altogether homogeneous, being purely Sri Vaishnava. His spirit must have rejoiced in it, for it was entirely congenial to him, and his inquisitive mind must have found much to learn from it. He was all the time gathering impressions, which were gradually taking a definite shape within his mind. He was sure to come across a number of highly learned, pious and holy men in many of these places. Some of them must have made efforts to convert him to their faith, but the remarkable thing is that he remained free from joining any of the Churches that he came across in the course of his pilgrimages. This can be explained only on the ground that he had already arrived at a definite form of faith of his own, though it may not have been organised at this early stage into a regular system.

Vallabha turned now westwards to go to those parts which are now known as Travancore and Malabara. The temple of Padmanabha is one of the most important in this region and is so richly endowed that thousands of Brahmins are fed twice every day in it. A very interesting characteristic of this temple is that the state of Travancore belongs to it, the Prince thereof ruling the State only as a servant of the Deity of the temple. This gives the State a more purely religious character than that of any other Hindu State in the whole of India. In consequence of this,

the entire territory of the State is honeycombed with temples and rest-houses known as *Dharmashalas*. These latter number no less than 360, and food is given free in many of these to all who ask for it.

From here Vallabha went to Janardana Kshetra. In commemoration of his visit to this place, his followers have raised a monument called *Bethaka*. He then visited the temples of Deva-Narayana and Jagan-Narayana, and thence went to Kaundinyashrama. This last place is situated on a hill between the two mountains known as Niladri and Malayadri, close to a river called Kaundini. All this region is full of beautiful natural scenery. This is true to some extent of the whole of Malabara, its very name signifying hills and dales. The rainfall here is heavy and as the country is not far from the equatorial region, it is green all the year round. Malabara, Travancore and Ceylon may well be said to be perpetual springlands

Kaundinyashrama is situated in the midst of a deep forest and has a number of sandal-wood trees round about it. The place had special significance for Vallabha, for it was here that Vishnu Swami is said to have got true knowledge from a Rishi called Kaundinya, knowledge which gave him final beatitude. The same Rishi is said to have appeared before Vallabha and told him the following :

“ Our *Guru* is Shandilya Rishi. He performed penance for a long time on Mt. Govardhana in order that God might manifest Himself to him. Ultimately he got his reward, for God was pleased with him, and there appeared before him a Munikanya called Lalitadevi. She gave him the initiation into *Bhakti Marga*, saying : “ There is nothing greater than Sri Purshottama. Neither the Vedas, nor the gods, know Him properly. One must have deep and full faith in Him, and in none else. Renouncing all idleness, one must remember God's *Lila*, His gracious sport, every

moment. You should constantly say to yourself. 'I am a servant of God : He alone is my Master. Neither the Vedic nor the man-made means will avail in any way. The happiness of the world which ultimately results in misery is no good. When shall I find God ? When will God show His favour to me ? When shall I see the face of Him who is the destroyer of the pride of all ?' If you go on feeling this and seeing God in the world, you will see the supreme *lila* of God" Saying this, she disappeared. Shandilya Rishi practised this *Sadhana* for some time with the result that he ultimately found God."

This Shandilya Rishi is one of the great teachers of Bhakti-Marga in India. There is a text-book on Bhakti known by his name, which, though it may not have been written by him, has considerable prestige owing to its association with his name.

As for Kaundinya Rishi, his story has much significance as an illustration of God's grace. The story given in Bhavishya Purana is as follows :

Kaundinya was a Rishi. His wife's name was Shila. Once upon a time she took a string from Anantajee, at which her husband was much incensed and he threw it in fire. In consequence of this arrogance on his part and anger, he was reduced to extreme penury. Shila told him this, whereupon he repented much and renounced home in order to find forgiveness from Anantjee. He gave up even food and drink and went from place to place asking every one and even animals and trees if they had seen Anantjee. The reply was invariably in the negative, which pained him all the more. As a result of this self-starvation and wandering about he fainted often, and whenever he came to his senses, he would cry out, " Oh, Anantjee, Oh, Anantjee ". The latter had then pity on him and appeared before him in the form of an old Brahmin. He took Kaundinya by his arm and led him to his place under the earth. He there manifested himself to Kaundinya

in his true form which was that of God Himself. At this the latter was overjoyed and began to praise and pray Him thus : " O God, I am a sinner, I am full of sin, my very origin is in sin; therefore, O Lord, have mercy on me ! Be my refuge ! To-day I have reached the goal of my life. This day the desire of my life has been fulfilled." Hearing this God gave him His blessing and fulfilled his heart's desire, which was to abide in God always.

The extreme humility and the emphasis on one's sinfulness depicted herein, strike almost a new note in Hinduism, and it well shows how the human heart is moved by the same feelings, whether in the East or in the West.

Vallabha visited next Sri Rangapattama, which has a temple of Sri Ranganathjee. It is surrounded here on all sides by the river Kaveri. Close to Rangapattama is Mahilakota, where Ramananda, the great Bhakti teacher of the North, had his home before he settled in Benares. This place is, besides, a seat of Sri Sampradaya, and it was here that it first raised a body of men called Vira-Vaishnavas, a group of militant followers, who helped much in the protection of this Church as well as other Vaishnava Churches from such bodies as Shaivites etc.

Subramnya was another place visited by Vallabha in this itinerary of his. Here he had a discussion with the orthodox Brahmins on the question of the necessity of performing Vedic Karmas. These challenged his positions in several ways, but Vallabha gave satisfactory replies to all their questions and the discussion ended amicably.

Vallabha then went to Udapa, a stronghold of Madhva Sampradaya. As several leaders of this Church had their seats in this place, they had important discussions with him, especially on the relative merits of Dualism and Monism. Vallabha's philosophi-



cal position was monistic, though not in the same sense as that of Shankar. As a matter of fact, to him Shankar's philosophy was anything but monism, and, to differentiate his philosophy from it he gave his system the name Shuddhadvaita, Pure Monism. He made his position clear to the leaders of the Madhva Church by advancing many arguments on its behalf, and the latter also tried to expound to him their dualistic philosophy. The discussions, while they resulted in no conversion of any party to the belief of the other, ended at any rate very amicably.

In a place called Gokarna, Vallabha had a discussion with the pundits thereof. These were Shaivites and the subject of their controversy was whether Shaivism was not superior to Vaishnavism. In regard to this matter Vallabha made his position clear to them, which was that of giving the worship of Shiva a place subsidiary to that of Vishnu. He had no quarrel with Shaivism as such, especially when it was theistic. To him Shiva was but a form of Vishnu, albeit a secondary form, and as such His worship was helpful. In this matter his position was not so militant as that of Ramanuja or Madhva, to both of whom the worship of Shiva was something of an anathema.

Chandragiri was the next important place of Vallabha's halt, it being a centre of Shankar's followers. Here he met a number of Sannyasis, with whom he had a discussion as regards the relative merits of the worship of the five gods as established by Shankara, and of one God in accordance with the Vaishnava belief. Vallabha's argument was that the former kind of worship was not meant for those who desired the final beatitude. It was helpful only to those who aimed at worldly good. He added that all the Scriptures, the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Gita and the Puranas enjoined the worship of but one God. He said, besides, that it was a matter of expediency with Shankara to have established such worship, inasmuch as owing to the prevalence of Buddhism in the country there was little understanding of the Vedic Scriptures left among

the people, and that since they were divided into various small sects, each worshipping its own God, he wanted to unite all these into one body. Vallabha then gave an exposition of his own belief in regard to God and His nature. It is said that they all parted as friends

As we have said above, only in one place during the course of his present pilgrimage in the South, Vallabha had a painful experience. He is said to have had many discussions with learned men belonging to various sects, but they all ended happily. Very likely, what we have described so far may have taken place not in the first round of his pilgrimage but the second, or even later. Whatever it be, there is no doubt that he must have caused much surprise among the people wherever he went by his profound understanding of the Scriptures, his powerful intellect and wisdom. The fact that so young a person possessed these qualities was enough to captivate the hearts of the people from the start, and it created a most favourable atmosphere for the various discussions that took place. Vallabha was, besides, full of what is called sweet reasonableness, and what is more to his credit is that he never adopted a defiant or challenging attitude.

Vallabha now came to Vijayanagara, which was, for the time being, his home. His mother, brothers and sisters were all there, and it was but natural that he should be anxious to see them. They too, especially the mother, were eager to see him and know how he had fared in his pilgrimage so far. Apart from this, Vijayanagara had its own attraction for the youthful genius. He must have made many friends there during his stay some time back, and he would now like to compare notes in regard to his observations and experiences with some of them. In any case, his return to Vijayanagara was a matter of much joy to himself, his family and all his friends and well-wishers.



## CHAPTER VII

### **Vallabha turns northwards**

According to the traditional accounts, Vallabha's stay in Vijayanagara this time does not seem to have been long. The urge within him for finishing his pilgrimage all round Bharatkhanda was great, and he soon left home to go over the rest of the country. What he had seen and experienced so far had naturally whetted his appetite for more knowledge and spiritual experience, and made him eager for new ventures. The more difficult part of his adventure was to begin now, for the area he had to cover now was much bigger than what he had done so far. Hitherto he had travelled in a part of the country which was homogeneous in culture and religion, and because of the great power of the State of Vijayanagara, it was free from political upheavals of any kind. In sharp contrast to this, North India, at the time we are speaking of, was full of turmoil, and there were conflicts going on not only between the Hindus and the Moslems, but even among the various groups of each of these people. This added much to the risk that ordinarily lay in any pilgrimage. The fact, however, that Vallabha, who could hardly be at this time more than thirteen or fourteen years old, was allowed by his mother and uncle to go on a pilgrimage which might take years to finish, and from which for aught one knew, he might never return, can be explained only in one way, viz, that they were assured in their mind of his extraordinary powers and genius. Under no other circumstances, his widowed mother would have allowed him to go so far from her, especially when it meant years of separation and so much risk of every kind.

The more one studies these rounds of pilgrimage, the more is one struck by their uniqueness. In the religious history of India, many young men and even boys, their number running into thousands, left their homes to roam at large over the country. This was done by them, however, surreptitiously, and they rarely came back to their people. With them it was a total renunciation of home and family. Many of them became Sadhus or Sannyasis, and if they ever returned to their people, it was in a new capacity. Vallabha's case stands in sharp contrast to that of most of these men. He goes on this great venture more in the capacity of a *Brahmachari*, a student, than anything else. He does not renounce the world in any way, and comes back to his people again and again. This thing marks him out as a person unique from his early days.

After staying for some time in Vijayanagara, Vallabha, in company with two or three of his disciples mentioned above, started for his pilgrimage in North India. He turned at first westwards and went to Kolhapura. In this neighbourhood he visited some of the temples on the Sahyadri Mountains, especially where the river Krishna has its source. This part of the country has a beauty of its own, though it is different from what one comes across in Malabara and Travancore.

The next important centre of pilgrimage which Vallabha visited was Pandharpura. This place was held sacred even then for its temple of Sri Vithalnathjee, now known all over India as Vithoba, whom Tukaram, the great saint of Maharashtra, later on worshipped with such exemplary devotion. Vallabha stayed in this place for some days, during which time he had much fellowship with several religious men thereof. The followers of Vallabha have built here a monument on one of the banks of the river Bhima in memory of his visit to this holy town.

Vallabha visited then Nasik, which is situated on the bank of the river Godavari. Sri Ramachandra is said to have stayed

here in Panchavati, which event gives the place its sanctity. Nasik was then a centre of orthodox Brahminism and as such a stronghold of Shaivism. It seems Vallabha had at this time a number of discussions with some of the learned men of the town. As has been said already, Vallabha was not antagonistic to the worship of Shiva, which made his position more acceptable to these Shaivite leaders than that of many Vaishnava bodies. Vallabha is said to have quoted the Pancha-Ratra, the great book on Bhakti-Marga, for the first time in these discussions. A monument has been raised in Panchavati in honour of Vallabha's visit, just where Sri Rama is said to have performed his penance and from where Sita was carried away by Ravana.

Trimbucka is another sacred place close to Nasik, both being mentioned together as Nasik-Trimbucka. Vallabha went there and worshipped Trimbuckeshwara.

From here the party proceeded to the river Tapti and then to the river Narmada, visiting the various shrines situated on the banks of these rivers. They then visited some places in Malwa and came finally to Mathura.

This last place derives its sanctity from its being the home of Sri Krishna just before he went to Dwarka. As such to Vallabha it was more important than all the places he had been to so far. This part of the land is called *Vraja-bhumi*, the land of Vraja, and it was the Holy Land for him *par excellence*. He, therefore, stayed here for some time, visiting every nook and corner of the neighbourhood, and soaked himself with the atmosphere thereof. Every bit of this land, every tree and plant, even the dust thereof, was sacred in his eyes, and being full of love and devotion, he could not but have deep communion with the spirit of Krishna while here. The river Yamuna, flowing through this part, was to him the most sacred of all the rivers, for Krishna had bathed in it and had performed many miracles

in it or on its banks. Evidently Vallabha had now reached his spiritual home, and he found the peace and rest which he was seeking. He had attained the goal of his quest and found in all probability what was nothing less than a new birth.

According to some of the traditions of Vallabha's Church, it was during this visit of his to *Vraja-bhumi* that the call of God came to him to establish his *Sampradaya*. The problem, however, is full of difficulties. It is said that he heard the voice of God calling him to this task in Samvata 154 (A. D. 1492). He could be only thirteen years old at this time, which makes the tradition hard to believe. This does not agree, besides, with other accounts. Indeed, the more one studies Vallabha's life, the more is one struck at the confusion of dates and events which one meets with at every step. What is said about the lack of the historical sense among the people of India unfortunately proves itself to be true in our study of the lives of Saints and religious teachers of the land. One wonders what the cause of this lack is. For one thing, it may be due to the fact that there has been no political unity in the land for centuries at any rate. Before the time of the Moguls, there were no great Emperors since the time of Asoka and Chandragupta, and even these left no era of their own behind them. The two eras usually followed in India are associated with Vikrama and Shalivahana known as Samvata and Saka respectively, and each of these is followed in only a part of the land. There is, thus, no uniformity in the reckoning of time. It is true both the Jains and the Buddhists have each an era of their own, dating from a time prior to the two mentioned above. They began with Mahavira and Buddha respectively, and as such they have a religious significance. These, however, have been strictly confined to the followers of the two faiths, and with the decline which set in the fortunes of these two religions, whatever vogue they may have had at one time came to be lost.

The reasons mentioned above are, however, not sufficient to explain the lack of the historical sense among the people. It is

perhaps primarily due to the fact that the Hindus as a people have lived too much in the realm of ideas to take much note of time. They were too interested in being to take note of becoming; too much occupied with reality, abstract as it may be, to take note of appearance. They were too other-worldly to be interested in this world. They laid all the emphasis they could on the denial of the world, and hardly, if ever, affirmed it. In this matter Vallabha's religious system was something of an exception to the prevailing systems, but he organised it in the period of his manhood, and he himself could not be fully conscious of all the implications thereof. These became evident at a later date. It is not easy, besides, to get rid of the influences of one's age and environment even for a great man.

This lack of historical sense and the consequent confusion of dates and events make it impossible for us to follow the thread of Vallabha's life in a definite chronological order, especially in its earlier period. All that we can do is to surmise, and accordingly we feel that it was impossible for Vallabha to have started his career as an Acharya at the time of his first visit to this part of the land when he was barely thirteen years old. It is more likely that he did it in his thirties. A number of his own followers have now come to feel that even the Kanakabhisheka could not have taken place before he was twenty-five years old, and according to them that marked the beginning of his career as an Acharya.

In accordance with this, we feel that Vallabha, after staying for some time in *Vraja-bhumi* went either to Gujarata or to the North. In all probability he had finished his pilgrimage to Dwarka, the extreme point on the west coast of India, before he came to Mathura. That is the more likely route for pilgrims from the South to follow, although the traditional account says that Vallabha went westwards from Mathura. The different accounts, however, contradict themselves, for the way he went about the province of Gujarata making disciples is that of a full-fledged Acharya, and



his visit to the shrines in North India which follows that to Gujarata is that of a pilgrim rather than that of an Acharya. This latter is more like that to the South. This discrepancy in the account seems to be due to the fact that Vallabha may have gone more than once to Gujarata and that his disciples remembered the events of his later visits better. We shall deal with these in a chapter by itself.

In the meantime, we shall proceed with Vallabha's pilgrimage in North India. From Vraja-land, he is more likely to have gone to what is known as Kurukshetra and thence to Haridwara. This last place is one of the most important centres of pilgrimage in India, because it is here that the holy river Ganges makes its entrance into the plains from the bosom of the Himalayas. The place is full of natural beauty, and the river with its white shining bed of sand and broad expanse of water is its greatest charm. Thousands of pilgrims flock to this place every year to wash themselves of their sins in the river from all parts of Bharatkhand.

From here Vallabha went to Rishikesh, another important centre of pilgrimage. This is situated further north and the way to it lies through scenery which is exceedingly beautiful. The Himalayas proper begin here and one is transported into another world. The grandeur of Nature is seen and realized here as in few other spots mentioned so far, and one is constrained to feel the presence of God more than ever. This is why the place has been the abode of hundreds of Sadhus for perhaps centuries. Their presence adds to the sanctity of the place.

Vallabha then visited many other sacred places on the Himalayas going much higher up such as Gangavatarana, Vyasa-Ganga, and Rudra-Prayaga. In this last place he is said to have met Bilva Mangala. From there he went to Gupta-Kashi and thence to Kedara. In Narayana-Pada he is said to have met



Muni Narada and Uddhava, two of the greatest devotees of God known in Hindu religious history. Close to this place in a place called Vyasashrama he is said to have met the great sage Vyasa, with whom he had much important conversation. All these four persons mentioned here are believed to have been living for some thousands of years, manifesting themselves only at times to people who are prepared to receive the knowledge of God which they alone have. That Vallabha met them is said only by the traditions of his Church. So far as we know he himself makes no mention of these meetings in any of his works.

: After visiting a few more places on the Himalayas, Vallabha and his party came down from the hills and went to Ayodhya. From there they went to Prayaga, Kashi and Shiva-Ganga. They then proceeded to Gaya, and thence to Ganga-Sagar, the place where the river Ganges enters the sea. From there they went to Jagannatha, the most important place of pilgrimage on the eastern coast of India. The party then came to Agrahara, thereby finishing their first round of pilgrimage. This place was now his home, for his mother was waiting for him there.

According to some accounts Vallabha is said to have taken nine years to finish this first round, and they give even the date when it was finished, viz., the third day of the bright half of the month of Vaishakha in the year Samvata 1554 (A. D. 1498). This seems to be truer to the facts than other accounts which give six or four years for the purpose.

## CHAPTER VIII

### **Vallabha's Second Round of Pilgrimage**

According to some accounts Vallabha's stay at home after his long and arduous pilgrimage lasting for several years was a short one. He is said to have remained with his family for about ten months and then started again on his second round on the second day of the bright half of the month of Chaitra in Samvata 1555 ( 1499 A. D. ). Whether this be a proper date or not, there is no doubt that the urge within him for re-visiting many of the shrines he had seen and for seeing some of those which he had not, was great and he obeyed it without hesitation. He was now a full-fledged youth and had attained a maturity of judgement in many matters of religious life and thought. His first tour was sure to have taught so impressionable and original a young man as he was much of the best in the religious life of the Hindus. He was, however, eager to learn more. Probably by this time he had come to some definite conclusions in the realm of philosophy and theology, which made him all the more anxious to compare notes with some of the great scholars and teachers scattered all over India. This was the second course of his education, theological as well as spiritual, in the great and unique University of religious life and thought which was training the Hindu mind and spirit in these centres of pilgrimage. In all probability many of his discussions which are said to have taken place during the course of the first tour belong to the second one.

Since we have already drawn an outline of what we may call the Holy Bharatkhanda in the preceding chapters, we need not

follow Vallabha in this tour of his in close detail. He turned southwards reaching Vijayanagara in course of time. In all probability he made a halt here for some weeks. After visiting the whole of North India, this city may have impressed him still more than what it did formerly. For aught we know, it was at this visit of his that he had his victory over the followers of Shankara resulting in the Kanakabhisheka

From Vijayanagara he went further south and then again to the north on the other coast. It was at Pandharpura that he had a most important experience, one which gave a new turn to his life. As we have said before, there is a temple here of Sri Vithalnathjee known as Vithoba. The peculiarity of this temple is that it is here of all places in India that Sri Krishna is worshipped with Rukhamani, his wedded wife. This has had undoubtedly a very wholesome influence on the Vaishnavism of Maharashtra, often known as the Bhagavata-Dharma. While this form of Bhagavata Dharma has lacked in the intensity of fervour associated with the movements of Sri Chaitanya and Vallabhacharya, it has had on the whole a great restraining and sobering influence. Probably at the time Vallabha visited this place it was not known as a great centre of devotion, for it was with the advent of Tukarama later on that the whole of Maharashtra in general and Pandharpura in particular came to be invaded by a veritable flood of *Bhakti*. It was, however, an important centre of religious life even at the time of Vallabha, and had its own significance in the religious history of India. The Vaishnavism associated with Vithoba stands mid-way between Sita-Ram worship on one side and Radha-Krishna worship on the other. It preserves, thus, the deeply ethical note of the first, having in addition something of the spiritual intensity associated with the worship of Krishna.

The story of how the Deity Vithaleshwara came to this place is also remarkable in many ways. It stands thus :

There was a Brahmin young man called Panduranga. He had taken to evil ways and was a source of much anxiety and misery to his parents. His home was in Pandharpura. Once a party of pilgrims started from here to go to Benares and Panduranga joined them with a view to rob them on the way. After going on this journey for a short while, he separated himself from the party in order to pounce upon them as a robber from a forest. Fortunately for him he lost his way in the jungle and before he could come out of it, the night fell. Being extremely tired and not knowing where to go, he lay himself down for rest and was soon overtaken by deep sleep. After some time hearing some noise close to him he woke up suddenly. On his looking round about him to find out what the sound was about, to his immense surprise he found two women with gold pitchers on their heads near by. He asked them who they were, whereupon one of them replied : "I am the river Ganges and this my companion is the river Yamuna. In the pitchers on our heads we are taking our holy water with us to a place not far from here." Panduranga then asked them what their destination was and for what purpose they were carrying the water with them. To this they replied : "We are on our way to Pandharpura, where resides a Brahmini, who is deeply desirous of bathing in our waters and thus washing himself of his sins. He can not do this, however, as he has to look after his parents who are old and infirm. As a reward for this holy service of his, we ourselves are taking this water with us so that he may bathe himself in it." At this, the surprise of Panduranga knew no bounds. He said to them : "Is it then so meritorious to serve one's parents ?" To this one of the women replied that it was so indeed and that one who honoured and served his parents with love and respect had all the places of pilgrimage in his own house. Saying this they vanished.

Wondering much at what he had seen and heard, Panduranga began seriously to repent for his sins and his failure in his duties towards his parents. He now turned from his evil

purpose and went back straight to Paudharpura. On reaching home he began to serve his parents with exemplary zeal. He fulfilled all his duties towards them in the best of ways for twelve years, at the end of which God was pleased with him so much that He wanted to manifest Himself to him. With this purpose God came to the house of Panduranga and knocked at the door. Just then the latter was massaging his father's legs and so he opened the door with one hand while keeping the other engaged in the work he was doing. When he saw who it was that had come to his house, he pushed a brick lying close by and said : " Please stand here on this brick while I am serving my father. I shall welcome you in the proper manner as soon as I finish this service of mine. " He took his full time for the massage and then stood up and bowed down to God with becoming reverence. He then adored and praised God for His exceedingly great mercy to him, a poor man who had done nothing to merit so great a reward. God said to him that He was much pleased with him for his zealous fulfillment of his duties towards his parents, and added, " Every one who performs his duties towards his parents in a fitting manner is very dear to me. All beings are dear to me, but those who do their work according to my good pleasure are dearer still. Those who do not serve their parents cut themselves off from me, for how can those who do not fulfill their duties which are so apparent, understand and fulfill those which are not so apparent ? How can those who do not honour their parents whom they see, honour Me whom they do not see ? I am indeed much pleased with you at your service of your parents. This is why I have manifested myself to you in my proper form. You can ask now for any boon you like and I shall fulfill your desire. "

Panduranga then prayed God to abide with him in his home and to take such a name as would show to the world the great reward there is in store for those who serve their parents with love and respect. In response to this prayer God assumed the



name Panduranga Vithalnathjee and took His abode with him. This is the origin of the temple of Vithalnathjee in Pandharpura.

The deeply ethical note underlying this story is but too evident to need any comment. Incidentally we might observe here that there lies underneath it an affirmation of the world which, indirect as it may be, is as real as it could be. The idea underlying the story is that the relationships of this world are real, tremendously so, and that the proper and loving fulfillment of all the duties which these bring with them are an integral part of religion and of true devotion to God. Both nature and humanity have thus asserted and impressed themselves on the character of a religion which was apt to be too ascetic and other-worldly. This religion was, besides, simplified in the extreme and made easily accessible to all and sundry, however poor and illiterate they may be. It also sweetened the whole of human life and made it even divine. If the command that one should love and honour one's parents is second in importance only to that of loving and honouring God, and if obedience to it precedes in time that to the latter, and if it acts, besides, as a necessary preparation for the latter, then surely it is a most vital and essential part of all true religion. It makes, besides, marriage the holiest of relationships, next in importance only to that between man and God.

It was, therefore, in the fitness of things that it was here in Pandharpura that Vallabha received a command from God to enter into the holy bond of marriage. We are not sure if he had been attracted hitherto to the ascetic life intending ultimately to be a Sadhu. The way in which he had put off marriage so long was unusual for Hindus, especially at the time we are speaking of. Besides, his going about the country in this manner almost constantly for years as a pilgrim and preacher, would lead one to think that he might have been tending increasingly towards permanent celibacy. It is certain that he could not have contemplated entering into married life and gone about in the way he did.



Such a thing was against all the traditions of religious life in the country. Everything, on the contrary, would tend the other way. Nothing could make this clearer than the sharp contrast that exists in this matter between Vallabha and Chaitanya. Both these great men were contemporaries, the latter being younger than the former by only eight or nine years. Chaitanya gave up the world, his mother and wife, when he made up his mind to devote himself entirely to religion. Soon after this renunciation of his, he started on a long pilgrimage similar to that of Vallabha. The most pertinent thing to remember in this connection, however, is the fact that Chaitanya was twenty four years old when he renounced the world, while Vallabha received the command to enter into marriage at a time of his life when he was in his early twenties.

It is far from proper on the other hand to believe that Vallabha had had enough of these travels and pilgrimages and celibacy, and that he wanted now to settle down as a householder. This is not true to facts, because he left home again for some time soon after his marriage for an all-India pilgrimage and preaching tour. He continued to go about for the purpose of preaching his Gospel more or less all his life. His entire life is of a piece with itself and he was of a nature from which nothing could be further than self-deception. All that we can say in regard to this matter is that he had kept the question of his marriage open until now, and that he decided in favour of it after he received an express command of God. That he did this at this age and in defiance of all the ordinary conventions of religious life expected to be binding on a man of his type, shows his deep faith in God and extraordinary courage before man.

An event of this kind was, besides, bound to give a new orientation to Vallabha's religious life and thought. The shrine of Viṭhoba at Pandharpura is the greatest centre of Vaishnavism in Maharashtra, and the Bhagavata Dharma it represents has some

peculiar features of its own. It is neither so orthodox as the Vaishnava Churches of the great Acharyas of the South such as Ramanuja or Madhva, nor so heterodox as the sects started in the north by Ramananda etc. Both these have, however, one feature in common, viz., ascetic orders, while the Bhagavata Dharma of Maharashtra centred round Pandharpura is comparatively freer from it. It is decidedly more positive in its attitude towards the world than most of the Vaishnava sects of the South. It is at the same time not so Brahmin-centred as these. It is the Vaishnavism as taught not by the Acharyas but by the Saints, many of whom did not belong to the Brahmin caste. All this had in all probability some influence on the mind of Vallabha at this time, especially if this tradition of his receiving the command of Vithoba for entering into marriage be true. Even though he did not go as far as this Vaishnavism in some matters, he did learn many important lessons therefrom.

It is worth noting that the Vaishnavism of Maharashtra was not influenced by the teachings of either Ramanuja or Madhva or Nimbarka. These may have a few followers in Maharashtra here and there, but their number is negligible, and at no time they had much vogue in this part of the land. One wonders why it was so. May it be due to the fact that the Brahmins of Maharashtra were too orthodox and conservative to yield themselves to this religion of love and devotion? May it also be due to their being too matter-of-fact a people? It is because of this last-mentioned characteristic of theirs perhaps that they are the most politically-minded of Brahmins in India. The Chitpavans are a class by themselves, a people who are haughty, proud and highly intellectual. The number of sceptics among them to-day is comparatively much larger than in any other community. At the time we are speaking of, they, in all probability, took shelter under Shankar's Monism, which supplied them with an easy cloak for their egotism and pride of caste. In any case they were too impervious to religious influences emanating from

popular movements, especially when these started from or had much vogue among what are known as the lower classes. This is why the Bhakti movement of the medieval ages did not affect them so much as it did the Brahmins in other parts of India. The gulf between them and other communities was too big to be easily bridged. While in the part of India lying further south, the Brahmins were numerically not so strong as to resist for long any pressure from below, here they were sufficiently strong to withstand it. This seems to us to be the reason why the Sampradayas of the Acharyas did not have a large following in Maharashtra.

The Vaishnavism that flourished in Maharashtra came largely from the Saints. Its beginning may be traced to Jnaneshwara, who flourished about the end of the thirteenth century. He was a Brahmin and is said to have been a personal disciple of Vishnu Swami. His commentary on the Gita in the Marathi language is a classic of religious literature and has inspired millions through its translations in different vernaculars all over the land. But the greatest names connected with the Bhagavata Dharma in Maharashtra are those of Namadeva and Tukarama. There are several others, but they are minor ones in comparison with these. Most of these Saints are from non-Brahmin castes, while one or two of them belonged to the untouchable communities.

At the time of Vallabha, Namadeva was the sole father of this Bhagavata-Dharma, for Tukarama came on the field nearly a century later. Namadeva's date is not certain. Probably he lived in the second half of the fourteenth century. He was a tailor by caste, and he dedicated himself to God from his early life. Being a poet he took to composing songs of devotion called *Abhangas* in praise of Vithoba, the number of which runs into hundreds. It was these lyrics, simple, sweet and full of deep devotion, which gave for the first time wide currency to the teachings of the Bhakti Marga in this province. His own life was, besides, an embodiment of the Gospel he was preaching. In course of time, he was

followed by another Saint, Tukarama, under whom the movement gathered much strength. Although Vallabha lived too early to have known this phase of the movement, in his time the shrine of Pandharpura had a peculiarity of its own to make a deep impression on him. This alone can explain the tradition of the command of God received by him. The tradition goes further and says that the Deity Vithaleshwara promised him that He would take birth in his family as his son. All this proves at any rate that Vallabha received much light in this place.

From Pandharpura Vallabha went further north and then turned westwards towards Gujarata. In this last-mentioned province, he is said to have made many disciples. He then went to Vraja-land again, and after finishing his pilgrimage there, went to the Himalayas, where he visited Badrinath, a place of pilgrimage which he had not gone to during his last tour.

He visited Vyasashrama again where he is said to have seen the great Teacher Vyasa once more. The sage solved some of his doubts, confirmed him in many of his convictions and asked him to found a new Church. He also asked him to marry and thus be a householder.

Coming down from the Himalayas and visiting various places on the way, Vallabha came at last to Benares. Here a surprise was in store for him. A Brahmin called Devadatta offered him his daughter in marriage, whereupon Vallabha sent for his mother from her place of residence. In the meantime he visited some places, going as far as Jagannatha Puri. From there he returned back to Benares. Thus was finished his second round of pilgrimage.

We might well say that Vallabha had now attained his majority in every sense of the term. He had entered his manhood, had resolved to enter into the holy bond of marriage, and received

the call from God for his life's work. This tour was in many respects most fruitful for him.

Soon after his return to Benares, his marriage took place and he began his life as a householder. This was the beginning of a new life for him, with consequences which were far-reaching for him and for his Sampradaya.

Unfortunately we are again at a loss to fix the date of so important an event in his life. From the meagre and almost conflicting accounts that are available, we are led to surmise that it took place somewhere near Samvata 1556 (A. D. 1500). There is no doubt that Vallabha stayed about this time, perhaps for a couple of years or more, in Benares or near it. The beginning of his career as an Acharya, it seems to us, must be placed about this time. In all likelihood it took place simultaneously with the foundation of the temple of Govardhannathjee, the date for which is given as Samvata 1556 (A. D. 1500).

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## CHAPTER IX

### The call of God to Vallabha

In Vallabha's own words as given in his booklet *Siddhanta Rahasya* (The Secret of Doctrine), it was at mid-night on the eleventh day of the bright half of the month of Shravana that the command of God came to him to give initiation to people into the new way God had revealed to him. During the course of his tours round India, he had come to realise something of the chaos that prevailed in the religious life of the country. Everywhere the people practised a type of religion, which had become altogether formal and lifeless. They followed mere forms and performed rituals and ceremonies which had lost their meaning, with the consequence that there was no spiritual life left among them worth the name. Vallabha felt this loss more than most people and he speaks of it with a reiterated emphasis. What he saw in the various places of pilgrimage he visited had confirmed him in this view of his, and he had come to realise that nothing less than a new Revelation of God could meet the situation.

It was in fact the spirit of the times, of the *Kali Yuga*, the dark and evil age, that had manifested itself at its worst. This was the cry raised in many of the Puranas including the Bhagawata, and it was brought home to Vallabha by his personal observation. Things had become much worse since the Puranas were written, for the advent of the Moslem rule in several parts of India had made the situation more acute than ever. Human effort had become altogether bankrupt in the face of such dire need, and only an overwhelming grace of God could tide over the



crisis. The chief need of the times was to find redemption, to be free from one's sins, and to be so united to God in loving fellowship that not only sin became impossible but that man came closer and closer to God.

The way to do this was disclosed, revealed in a special manner to Vallabha by God Himself, Who wanted to bring to Himself His elect souls, souls which are *Daiivi*, i. e. divine in character, for this work of His. He chose Vallabha as His mouthpiece and instrument. This new dispensation was, accordingly, one of pure grace on God's part, and all that was required on the part of man was to submit himself by his free-will to this grace of His and to the way He opened. Vallabha was given a most beautiful word to express this new relationship between man and God that was to come into being, viz., *Brahmasambandha* (fellowship with God), a word full of the deepest spiritual significance and almost unique in the religious phraseology of the world. Accordingly Vallabha unfurled the flag of a New Dispensation, a New Revelation of God, for the purpose of bringing His children back to Himself.

Unfortunately here again we are at a loss to find the year in which this great event took place. Our surmise is that it occurred some time between his second and third round of pilgrimage, possibly between Samvata 1556 and 1558 (A. D. 1500 and 1502). According to this dating it was in his twenties that Vallabha proclaimed this New Dispensation and laid the foundation of his Sampradaya or Church. It is impossible that this event could have taken place much later. That he should have taken this responsibility upon himself while he was more or less a youth, is a remarkable testimony to his spiritual greatness. Our surprise and wonder grow when we remember that he had made no man his *Guru* or Teacher. His was an entirely independent Sampradaya, and he based it on a special revelation of God given to him at a time when he had not entered his full manhood.

There is a tradition among Vallabha's followers that he comes in the succession of Vishnu Swami and Bilva Mangala, but there is not a word to this effect in his own writings. Rather what little he has written about the teachings of Vishnu Swami would point the other way. Very likely this tradition sprang up later on in his Church in order to meet the criticism of its opponents that it was without a succession of any kind. Another reason for the existence of this tradition may be, as we have said elsewhere, that possibly Vallabha, in the earlier part of his life, may have been drawn more to Vishnu Swami's Sampradaya than to any other of the Vaishnava Churches. If there was any such influence, it was only for a short duration. An English author, Dr. J. N. Farquhar, in his book *Religious Literature of India*, has advanced the hypothesis that the tradition rose in consequence of the success of the Church of Vallabha in absorbing most of the followers of Vishnu Swami into itself. We mention this just in passing without adding any comment of our own.

The voice of God, mentioned above, came to Vallabha at mid night while he was in Gokula, the place where Sri Krishna passed his childhood. The voice was audible as can be seen from the fact that Vallabha asked Damodardas, his constant companion, the next morning if he had heard anything at night. To this the latter replied that he had heard some voice, but that he could not distinguish what it said. Vallabha told him what it was and asked him to take the initiation in accordance with the command of God. Damodardas then performed all his ablutions, and presented himself before Vallabha, who gave him the initiation. This was done by means of the utterance into the ear of the disciple the *mantra*, formula, *Sri Krishna Sharnam Mamah*, Sri Krishna is my refuge. This was to be the guiding principle of his life, and in all things he had to surrender himself to Krishna who was no other than the Supreme God Himself.

Damodardas was, thus, the first of the Vaishnavas of this new Sampradaya and as such he is held in reverence by the

followers of this faith. As we have said before, Vallabha said to him once that the new Way was established for him. No praise could be greater than this for any man, and it well shows the premium that is placed in Vallabha's Church on simplicity and humility of heart and child-like faith and trust, for Damodardas had no other gifts but these. The initiation was given in course of time to other people.

Vallabha wrote his *Siddhanta Rahasya*, the Secret of Doctrine, about this time as has been already said. In this little poem, consisting only of three verses and a half, he tells us how the call came to him and what the Brahmasambandha, the establishment of relationship between soul and God, means. It is with him primarily redemption of the soul from sin. He enumerates in the booklet five kinds of sins, viz., *sahaja*, those originating in *desha* and in *kala*, in *samyoga* and *sparsha*. These are variously interpreted by his followers. Some interpret the first kind as those which are born with one: the second as those which accrue to one from his association with a particular place: the third from evil time: the fourth as produced by evil company and the last from contact with evil things such as wine, meat etc. Others interpret them in a more subtle and spiritual manner. For example, Gokulotsava, one of the successors of Vallabha, defines them as the identification of one's spirit with various things. According to him, the first kind of sins are due to the superimposition of one's true self on *Prana*, the vital breath, the second to the forgetfulness of one's essential nature, the third to the superimposition of the spirit on one's body, the fourth on one's mind and the fifth on one's senses.

Whatever this be, the most important fact to take note of in this connection is that with the initiation and the new relationship with God that it brings with it, the soul becomes completely free from sin, and provided it remains faithful to the vow of surrender it has taken, it goes on growing in the grace of God. This emphasis on the redemption from sin is worth noting. It gives

the lie to some of the conceptions that have been made current and even fashionable in modern times by some pseudo-Vedantists belittling the sinfulness of human souls. Hinduism, in all its important phases, has never made light of this cardinal fact of human life, and the aim of all *Sadhana*, spiritual means, has been primarily the redemption from sin. The doctrine of Karma, which has been an integral part of Hinduism for more than two thousand years at any rate, however misunderstood it may be and whatever be its imperfections, chiefly means this inherent sinfulness of man. The age-long cry of the Hindus to be free from the bondage of karma shows how the load of sin has weighed upon the Hindu heart. So far as the gravity of sin is concerned, both Hinduism and Christianity stand practically on the same level. Where they differ is in the conception of sin that each of these two religions (and these are the only two religions of the world which need to be compared on account of their depth and all-roundness) has. The doctrine of Karma is decidedly more ethical than the Jewish and the Christian idea that sin is inherited from Adam. Apart from the mythical origin of this latter belief, it is almost, if not altogether, mechanical and materialistic in its essence, for it makes human beings mere automatons and takes away most of their individual guilt and responsibility. Happily men are better than their theories, which is the reason why the idea of original sin is not always carried to its logical conclusion, and some sort of moral responsibility of the individual has been recognised. It has, however, given rise to some of the most fantastic theories of Atonement among the Christians presenting God almost as a Monster of Justice, who exacts his full pound of flesh even to the last atom by way of retribution for the sins of mankind, from Jesus on the cross.

The Law of Karma, on the other hand, stands in sharp contrast to that of this physically inherited sin as believed in by the Jews and the Christians. The discovery of this Law is, in fact, one of the greatest glories of Aryan and especially Indo-



Aryan thought, and it has introduced into all the religious thought and life of the Hindus a depth and profundity which are found nowhere else. In whatever way it may have come to be bound up in course of time in India with the belief in the transmigration of souls, it is an integral part of the belief in *Rita* held by the Indo-Iranians. The Hindu thought recognises thus the worst that could be said in regard to the gravity of sin, and its greater glory lies in this that, while doing so, it has recognised the operation of what we may call the Law of Grace, which supplants and nullifies the other. This has been done especially by the Bhakti-Margas and Vallabha perhaps has gone a stage further in this matter than others *Brahmasambandha*, with the full surrender to God of the soul that it implies, is the redemption from sins to begin with. That is the first step which is followed by others. As we have dealt with these elsewhere, we need not discuss them here.

Another event of much spiritual significance for the rise and spread of Vallabha's Sampradaya was what is called the *Prakatya*, manifestation, of Sri Govardhannathjee. The date of this event is more certain, being given as either Samvata 1556 ( A. D. 1500 ), or 1558 ( A. D. 1502 ). We feel that both these things, the foundation of Vallabha's Church and the manifestation of the Image of Sri Govardhana, are connected with each other in time as well as spiritual meaning. The latter, at any rate, gave a great impetus to the expansion of the new Church. There is a sort of supernaturalism about it, and apart from its influence on the mind of the general public, it may have given to Vallabha himself a new turn in his thinking. The Images in Vallabha's Sampradaya are called *Swarupas*, which means forms of God Himself, and as such they hold a place in the thought and life of his followers which is almost unique.

The story of the manifestation of Sri Govardhannathjee, as given in the literature of this Church, is as follows :



This Image represents Sri Krishna as holding the Mt Govardhana in his upraised hand for the purpose of protecting the people of Vraja, when the god Indra let loose upon them the waters of the heavens in abundance in order to destroy them by way of punishment. This was done because they had refused to give him his usual tribute of sacrifice at the instance of Krishna, who was then a mere boy. At first only one arm, the upraised one holding the mountain, was seen coming out from a hole in one of the hills of Giriraja in Vraja. This is said to have taken place on the third day of the dark half of the month of Shravana in the year 1466 (A. D. 1410). As this was a kind of miracle, people flocked to see it in large numbers. They wanted to take out the Image from the hole, but a man called Vruda asked them not to be in a hurry about it. He told the people to let the Image come out in its own time. The people then bathed the arm with milk and worshipped it. This was done first on the day called *Naga panchami*, the day dedicated to the worship of snakes. From that time onwards, this place came to be looked upon as a shrine, and every year a fair was held on this day.

Later on the face of the Image appeared, an event which is said to have taken place on the day Vallabha was born. From this time this Image was fed every day in a miraculous manner. In a village close by called Anyora, there lived two brothers of the name Manekchanda and Sadupande. They kept a number of cows, one of which was believed to belong to the breed of the cows of Nandaraijee, the foster father of Sri Krishna. This cow went every day to the Image and poured all her milk into its mouth. The brothers not knowing this suspected that somebody milked the cow surreptitiously, and accordingly one day Sadupande kept a close watch on it in the evening. He then saw how the cow went to the Image and fed it with her milk. Sri Govardhanathjee told him that He bore the names of Indra-damana, Deva-damana and Naga-damana, because He it was who had resisted the pride of all these, Indra, gods and snakes, and humiliated them.

He added that since He had drunk the milk of the cow ever since His manifestation, Sadupande should send him the milk of the same cow twice every day. This was done accordingly for some years.

Later on a Sadhu called Madhavendra Swami, belonging to the Church of Madhva, came on a pilgrimage to Giriraja and worshipped the Image of Govardhannathjee there. Being much pleased with the Image and its history, he desired to offer it food cooked by himself. He was told by the Image, however, that it would take no food until it was offered by Vallabha. Soon after the latter came to the place, and while he was taking rest near the house of Sadupande, he heard a voice asking Naro, a daughter of Pande who used to take the cow's milk every day, to bring the daily offering. This voice was similar to the one Vallabha had heard before in a forest where Sri Krishna had spoken to him, and hence he recognised it at once. He then went to the Image and worshipped it in a befitting manner. Soon after he got a small temple built on Giriraja and installed the Image therein. A man called Ramadasa Chowdhri was entrusted with the task of serving it. This event is said to have taken place on the second day of the bright half of Chaitra of the Samvata year 1556 ( A. D. 1500 ).

Some time after this, a man of the name Purnamall, a rich merchant, was asked by Sri Govardhannathjee to build a big temple for him. This work was started accordingly, but it took twenty years to finish it. The Image was then installed in this new temple by Vallabha himself, and he engaged some Bengali Brahmins as priests thereof. He placed two of his disciples at the service of the Image. One of these, Krishnadas, was made the steward of the temple, and the other, Kumbhandas, was entrusted with the work of composing and singing suitable hymns of praise and adoration.

Since Vallabha's time this Image has been removed to Sri Nathadwara, a place near Udaipur, owing to the troubles caused by the Moslems. The Image is now known as Sri Nathjee and holds the highest place in the hearts of the followers of Vallabha as the chief of God's Swarupas or forms.

It is also said in the literature of this Church that Swami Madhavananda, mentioned above, was made the head-priest of the new temple. This Swami is said, besides, to have taught Vallabha while he was a boy taking his education in Benares, such Vaishnava Scriptures as the Gita, the Bhagavata and Narada-Pancharatra. If this account of his being a teacher of Vallabha in his boyhood be true, then evidently, he may be said to have exerted the greatest possible influence in the shaping of Vallabha's mind in his early days. The same Swami is credited, besides, with having exerted a most profound influence on Sri Chaitanya indirectly if not directly. It was one of his disciples, who was primarily instrumental in converting Sri Chaitanya to Vaishnavism.

Swami Mahavananda seems to have been, besides, a pioneer in the work of building temples in the Vraja-land, investing it thus with a new sanctity. Until about the time of his coming to these parts and a little later, Vraja-land was, according to Mr. Growse, an English author, more of a jungle than anything else. It was the Vaishnavas, especially those of the Chaitanya Sampradaya, who first developed it and made it so important a centre of pilgrimage that every nook and corner thereof became associated with some phase or other of the early period of Krishna's life. This was primarily due to the overwhelming interest that Sri Chaitanya took in Vrandavana and the surrounding country. In his case this interest was largely inherited from his *Gurus*, who belonged to the Church of Madhva and were disciples of Madhavendra Swami. An English author, M. T. Kennedy, in his book, *The Chaitanya Movement*, makes the following interesting comment in regard to this matter :

“ But aside from this common attraction exercised on all Bhaktas, Chaitanya inherited through his Gurus a more direct interest in the sacred country. As we have already pointed out, both his *diksha* (initiation) and *sannyasa* (ordination) Gurus were disciples of the great Madhavendra Puri who, fifty years before, had turned the thoughts of Bengal Vaishnavas towards the sacred sites of Vrandavana. *He had even established a small temple there and installed two Bengali priests as its custodians.*” (The italics are ours ).

Evidently this Madhavendra Puri is the same person that is mentioned in the literature of Vallabha Sampradaya. The temple mentioned here is no other than that of Sri Govardhannathjee. In all likelihood, he had much to do with the building of it in its earlier stages, i. e. before Purnamalla built the larger temple. It was probably he who invited or welcomed the co-operation of Vallabha in the management of the temple. The late Mr. Telivala, a great research scholar of Vallabha's Church, was distinctly of this opinion.

Madhavendra Puri forms thus the one visible link between the Vaishnavism of the South and that of Vallabha. He is, besides, the one man to whom both Vallabha and Chaitanya, the two great leaders of Vaishnavism in the sixteenth century, are personally indebted in more ways than one. He had indeed something to do with the shaping of their beliefs. That it should have fallen to his lot to do this is one of the greatest tributes that could be paid to him.

The installation of the Image in this temple, with which Vallabha came to be associated in the years Samvata 1556-58 ( A. D. 1500-02 ), gave a local habitation to the new Sampradaya, which had just come into existence, and helped much in its rise. The late Dr. Sir Ramkrishna Bhandarkar was of the opinion that the manifestation and installation of the Image marked the beginning of Vallabha's Church.

## CHAPTER X

### **Vallabha's Third Round of Pilgrimage**

As has been said before, the interval between the second and the third tour of Vallabha was a most significant one for him in many ways. He had now attained his full majority in more senses than one. He had married and become a householder, which in itself marked a change in his life. He had, besides, started giving initiation to people on his own account, which was nothing less than the establishment of a new Sampradaya or Church. He had also given this Church a local habitation and a name. All this perhaps urged him to go now on a tour round the entire Bharatkhandā in order to find out all those divine souls, for whose salvation God had revealed to him the new way.

Accordingly he left Benares about a year after his marriage. The traditions of his Church say that he went first to Vraja-land, where he stayed for some time. From there he went to Ayodhya and then to Benares again, preaching his Gospel to people and making disciples.

From Benares Vallabha turned south-east and went to Jagannatha Puri and thence to Pandharpura. He turned next to Gujarata, in which province he visited many places, making disciples wherever he went. Evidently of all the parts of India, this seems to have been the most fruitful for the spread of the new Church. The accounts of people who became his disciples are full only as regards this province, and the number of devotees is



much larger here than elsewhere. What Chaitanya did only a decade later in Bengal at the other end of India, Vallabha was doing now at this end. Both Bengal and Gujarata were thus ripe for the preaching of the new Gospel of Bhakti, and God had raised two such men, extraordinarily endowed with divine gifts for this great work.

From Gujarata Vallabha went to Ujjain in Malwa and from there to Lahore in the Punjab. He then went to the Himalayas where he is said to have visited both Kedarnatha and Badrika-shrama. He went again to Vyasashrama where he is said to have seen the great sage Vyasa again. The latter solved his doubt in regard to some verses in the Bhagavata Purana. From here he returned to Vraja-land. He then went to Agra, Kanouja and Adel. In this last place he was requested by one of his disciples, Someshwara, to make it his home, especially as the country round about produced three kinds of Tulsi plant, which is held so dear by Vishnu. One of these was the ordinary kind, another white and the third black. It also produced Malti and Dhatri. The place Adel was considered sacred because of this, and as such it proved acceptable to Vallabha. He made up his mind to make it his head-quarters, and went to Benares to fetch his mother and wife. Thus was finished his third tour, which is said to have taken four years.

In our narration of these tours, we have so far deliberately abstained from giving a detailed account of Vallabha's work in Gujarata. What he did in this province was more in the nature of spreading his Church than a pilgrimage proper. The accounts that we have of his itinerary here are full of the work of preaching and making disciples. Very likely there is a confusion of dates in this matter, and probably much of what he did in his third tour is attributed to the second. Of the various places he went to, we shall mention only a few and describe the outstanding events that took place there.

One of these places is Siddhapura, a centre of pilgrimage and Hindu orthodoxy. On Vallabha's coming here, a number of Brahmin Pundits, holding Shankara's Mayavada, visited him and entered into a controversy with him as regards the truth of their system of philosophy. They were no match for Vallabha who, after controverting their position, explained to them his own system which he had begun now to call Brahmavada. The next day another group of Brahmins came to him and asked him whether the worship of Brahmins was not preferable to that of images etc., especially as the Vedas themselves had attributed to them a kind of divinity by calling them *Gurus*, teachers of all people. Vallabha replied to this that what they said was true in Sat-Yuga, the Golden Age, when the Brahmins were such not merely in name but in reality. They then knew the Scriptures properly and led a spiritual life. He added that even then it was not their bodies but spirits which were worshipped by the people, and that since then they had lost all claim to the reverence of people because they had fallen from their high state. He then said that the images were at least symbols, and as such there was no possibility of confounding the good with the evil in their case. He then preached to them his Gospel of Bhakti, which made the Brahmins and the lowest of the low alike in the eyes of God. Hearing this some of them became his disciples. There is a monument raised in this place in commemoration of his visit to it.

The next important place to which Vallabha went was Patan, a stronghold of Jainism. Here he met a number of Jain Sadhus, who put to him several questions concerning religion and morals. One of these was whether he believed in kindness and pity to animals as an integral part of religion. Vallabha replied that he did recognise such kindness as essential to all true religion, especially as he believed all creatures to be only parts of God, but that it was secondary to one's duty towards God. Because of this, he added, he did not give it that importance which was given

to it by the Jains. After discussing with them a few more questions, he told them wherein Jainism fell short, viz., that it did not believe in the existence of God as the Creator of this Universe; that it looked upon this universe as eternal, and that it regarded the Tirthankaras, who, according to its belief, had become perfect, as God Himself or rather so many Gods. He added that it was impossible to argue about these things since religious truth could be understood only when one became morally and spiritually fit for it.

Vallabha's stay in this place proved fruitful, for quite a number of people, some of them Jains, became his disciples. He gave them initiation and taught some of his principles in detail to a learned Brahmin of the place. He got a number his booklets copied by this man for the use of the disciples there.

Vallabha proceeded thence to Vadanagar and Vishnagar, both of which places were inhabited by a large number of Nagirs. These people look upon themselves as even higher than Brahmins, though their occupation is anything but religious. They are mostly devoted to political and civil work. As a class they are highly intellectual, perhaps more so than any other community in Gujarata, and being well-placed in life, they have formed an exclusive aristocracy of their own. They are mostly Shaivites by religious profession and Shankara's monism is held in high regard by them. Some of the leaders in both these places came to Vallabha to justify themselves and to controvert his position, but his arguments convinced a few of them as regards the truth of his teaching. These expressed a desire to become his disciples. There were also some people from other communities, especially the Vaishya ones, who wanted to take the initiation at the same time. Vallabha, in order to make no distinction among all these as to who should be administered the new rite first, gave the *Brahmasambandha* to them all simultaneously. He taught them thus the first lesson of humility and equality of all the believers in the new faith.

Vallabha proceeded then to a place called Kheralu. Among the many people who came to him here was a poor Brahmin widow, who deserves special mention. She said to him that as she was poor she had to work very hard to maintain herself and her two children, and that under these circumstances it was extremely difficult for her to find out the proper path to get her salvation. She added that various people pointed out to her various ways, which made it very hard for her to know which was the best among them. She was a woman truly poor in spirit and Vallabha was deeply touched by her desire to find the truth. He then told her that in order to find God it was not at all necessary to leave the world or practise asceticism of any kind, but that the one thing needful was to love God with all one's heart and soul. He added that what God desired from human beings was love, and that all could give this to Him while doing their duties towards their families etc. He told her also that the path of Bhakti was easier for women to follow than for men. She then became his disciple and Vallabha gave her a small image for worship. This widow holds a high place among the followers of Vallabha, and her faith is rewarded by a *Bethaka* being raised in her house. Her two sons, Jagannatha and Narahara, became later on so well-known for their learning and faith in the new way, that they came to be ranked among the eighty-four disciples of Vallabha. In the Bethaka at their place there is a pair of sandals of Vallabha.

Broach, Surat, Dumas etc, were the places visited next by Vallabha. In each of these he met a number of people, held discussions with some of them and preached his Gospel to all and sundry. Some of these became disciples of the new faith. There is a Bethaka in Broach and another in Surát.

In course of time Vallabha came to Kathiawad which, while being a part of Gujarata culturally and even politically, has some special features of its own. It is a peninsula jutting out into the



sea on the western coast of India, and has had on the whole a much more homogeneous culture than Gujarata proper. This is largely due to the fact that it has been freer from Moslem rule. It is, besides, famous for its places of pilgrimage such as Dwarka, the city where Krishna ruled, and the Jain temples on Mt. Girinara and Mt. Setrunjaya.

Vallabha, who was on his way to Dwarka, made a halt at a small place called Tragadi. He found here a welcome at a Brahmin's house, where at night he read and expounded some part of the Bhagavata Purana according to his usual practice. It so happened that on this day he read something from the account of the childhood of Krishna as given in the tenth book, especially the way in which Krishna used to eat butter at his foster-father's place on the sly. Now it so happened that the Brahmin had some cows of his own, which provided milk and curds and his wife used to churn the latter every day and take the butter out. She did the same next morning and went to fetch water from the river. Meantime her two sons woke up, and seeing the butter close at hand began to eat it with much glee and joy. On seeing this their father, instead of scolding and punishing them as he would ordinarily have done, thought of them as Krishna and Baldeva. He went straight to Vallabha and told him that the two divine brothers had come to his house and were doing what he had heard about them the previous night. On going into the house with him Vallabha saw the two boys, but felt within his mind that the man was still under the inspiration of the reading of the Bhagavata. Fearing that his wife may not see in this anything extraordinary, he asked him to go out to meet his wife on the way in order to tell her that what these little ones were doing was something divine, and that she should therefore neither rebuke nor punish them. The man did this with the result that his wife also took the same view of it as he did, and the incident ended in their conversion to the new faith. There is a fine human touch about this story and it shows well how the teaching of Vallabha



was humanising people. The present writer can say from his personal experience that the worship of Bala-Gopala, the child Krishna, has had remarkable influence on the minds of the people of India, especially the Vaishnavas, as regards the treatment of children. It has made them look upon the little ones of both sexes as almost divine and as such deserving extreme tenderness and delicacy. If at all, they have erred on the side of too great a mildness towards them rather than that of severity, a thing in which they have been more than justified by the latest theories of education.

Vallabha visited then several places in Kathiawad, Dwarka being one of them, and in each of these he made some disciples. While he was in Narayanasara, a man from Sindha met him and requested him to go to his province. Vallabha accepted this invitation and in course of time reached Thatha, which was then the capital of Sindha. The Moslems ruled this part of the country at that time, and as they had been in power for more than seven or eight centuries, the Hindus there were being proselytised by Islam in large numbers. Those who stuck to their faith had, besides, to suffer in some ways. Their position was made worse by the fact that Sindha has been isolated from the rest of India by sandy deserts extending over hundreds of miles : thus they were cut off from the main currents of cultural and religious life of the country. That Vallabha went there speaks volumes for his courage and zeal for the advancement of his cause. This was purely a missionary visit on his part, there being no place of pilgrimage to visit in Sindha. One important result of this was that several people became his disciples, families of many of whom are still continuing to belong to Vallabha's faith in Thatha, Hyderabad, Karachi etc. They with their strict vegetarianism and with their purely Hindu life and devotion, form a kind of oasis in the desert of semi-Moslem life of the Hindus in that province. It is in the fitness of things that a man called Narayanadas, in all probability a son of the man who invited Vallabha to Sindha, has found a place

among the eighty-four Vaishnavas known for their faith and devotion in the time of the great Teacher himself.

From Thatha Vallabha went to a few other places in Sindha and thence to the Punjab in the north. The account of Vallabha's tour in Gujarata, as we have given it in this chapter, is placed in the literature of his Church as belonging to his first round of pilgrimage. In the second tour, he is said to have visited a few more places such as Morvi, Jamnagar etc. In the third Baroda, Godhara etc, are said to have been visited by him. He is reported to have made disciples in all these places

## CHAPTER XI

### Vallabha settles down

Soon after finishing his third round, Vallabha seems to have made his home for some time in Benares. It was here that his father had lived, and during the latter part of his wandering life his mother and wife had their home in this city in all probability. Very likely they had a house of their own, for the family seems to have been in a flourishing condition all along. This, together with the fact that Benares was a great centre of Hindu religious life, may have led Vallabha to make it his place of residence. He had now a mission to fulfil and he had all the talents requisite for the purpose. It is no wonder then, if he thought this city to be the most fitted to serve as a place of residence and headquarters for himself.

Soon after settling down here, he is said to have given a feast to the Brahmins of the place, numbering as many as thirty thousand. This in itself, if true, was an event of no ordinary importance, especially as the feast was given by a Brahmin, and it could not but arouse much jealousy and suspicion in the minds of the orthodox leaders of the place towards the new teacher.

Vallabha soon after this unfurled a flag at his place, which was meant in all probability to be a symbol of his new Church. This too was naturally understood to be a challenge to the authority of the religious leaders of the place. This, together with other

things, gave rise to a number of controversies between Vallabha and different groups of learned people in Benares, all of whom felt offended at the new teaching and saw in it a menace to their vested interests and hold on the people. A little later a public controversy was held between most of the learned Pundits on one side and Vallabha on the other. This is said to have lasted for twenty seven days, resulting in Vallabha's victory at the end.

This, however, did not end the matter. Vallabha's teaching was new and original, and the faith he was preaching was too radical to be allowed to make its way unhindered. Controversies went on continually and his opponents began to issue what we now call pamphlets, in which they criticised strongly his faith and teaching. In reply to these the latter issued one in defence of his principles. He got this stuck at the gate of the temple of Sri Kashi-Vishveshvara, the most important temple in Benares, a proceeding which incensed his opponents so much that they tore his thesis asunder. This did not abate the zeal of Vallabha, and he went on working with the result that his cause grew. It did so, perhaps, slowly, but none the less steadily. There were not many men in the whole of Hindustan at that time who were equal to Vallabha in learning, in the knowledge of the Scriptures and in religious experience. It was no wonder then if the Pundits of Benares had the worst of it in their controversies with him, and some of them proceeded from arguments to more violent means. Some went even to the length of trying to do harm to his person with the help of occult powers. One man offered what is called *Satyagraha* in our days. He began a fast unto death and sat before the Deity in the temple of Kashi-Vishveshvara, praying God to declare by a miracle that Vallabha was wrong. The miracle came but it was in Vallabha's favour, for the God Shiva is said to have declared the following :

Whatever Vallabha has said is true, is true and is true again,  
The preacher is true, what he preaches is true.

May his teaching spread more and more !

May it spread against the teaching of Shankara !

Whatever this be, we are on surer ground in quoting some of the words of Vallabha as they are given in his thesis stuck at the gate of the Kashi-Vishveshvara temple. The last five verses of the thesis stand as follows :

“It is with the grace of Krishna that I have tried to destroy *Mayavada*,\* which is against the teaching of the Vedas. That it is anti-Vedic is confirmed by Mahadeva himself and there is no doubt about it. All those great souls who have faith in the Vedas, are also of the same opinion. I am indifferent to those who, not knowing the Vedas, do not accept this truth. I have established *Brahmavada*, which is found in all the Upanishads. May Mahadeva, the Lord of Kashi (Benares) and of the world, be pleased with these efforts of mine ! Any one who may have any doubt as regards what I have written here is welcome to me to clear his doubts. He should have no fear whatsoever, for it is the duty of the Brahmins to think what is true without any fear. This thesis which is stuck here on the gate of the Temple of Sri Vishvanathjee is a call to all the people to hear and know what is true. May the learned people hear this call, for they are the protectors of the Way of the Vedas ! ”

It is thus that Vallabha threw the challenge to the followers of Shankara in Benares, which was the chief stronghold of Mayavada in the whole of India. It is a challenge that is clear and ringing in its tones. This reminds us of a similar one thrown out about the same time in Europe by Martin Luther. Both these Reformers attacked the established Church of their times and harked back to the scriptures alone from the traditions that were imposed on them. Both of them had, besides, a unique

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\* This is said in reference to the philosophical system of Shankara, which, because of its belief in Maya, is called Mayavada.



experience of the grace of God, and they made all "works" as of no value. To them the grace of God was all sufficient, and all that one needed to do in order to appropriate it was to depend on and surrender to it whole-heartedly. In a way Vallabha's position was even more radical, for his affirmation of the world ran counter to the teaching of most of the Hindu teachers for several centuries at least. Luther also did affirm what we may call the this-worldly character of the religion of Jesus as against that of the other-worldly type that prevailed in his time and had been held in high regard for centuries by the Christians of Europe. There is something of a parallel between even the marriages of the two great reformers. Nevertheless, the contrast between the teaching of Vallabha and that of his predecessors among the Hindu teachers as regards the reality of this world, was certainly much greater than that between the teaching of Luther and that of the Roman Catholic Church.

In spite of this similarity between Vallabha and Luther in their teaching and practice, there is a difference between the two which needs to be taken note of. This difference is due primarily to their individual characters, but the roots of these lie deeper in the racial and religious heritage of each of them. A proper study of this subject would give us some sort of understanding of the genius of both Hinduism and Christianity. At the time when Luther came on the field, the latter religion was far more organised than Hinduism has ever been. This over-organization of Christianity is due, not to the teaching of Jesus Christ, but to that of the European temperament and genius. It is in no sense a development of the doctrine and practice of Jesus Christ, but rather a retrogression to the older ideals of Roman Imperialism, and as such it has effectively quenched the spirit of Christ. The Roman Catholic Church, which was for centuries the only Church that counted in Europe, the Orthodox Greek Church being confined entirely to Russia, was more of the nature of a politico-religious Empire than anything else. It was the very negation of the idea

of the Church that Jesus had in mind, if he thought at all in terms of a Church. It was decidedly more political in its outlook than religious, and all its energies were bent on preserving and expanding its temporal power. Religion was a most convenient and effective cloak for this all encompassing purpose, and the Church made full use of it as such. What Jesus Christ had feared the most in his temptations and in the Messianic expectations of his countrymen, was realized here not only in full, but to a far greater extent than he could have ever dreamt of. The Roman Catholic Church in its all-inclusive religious power and hold over a large part of Europe, and in its crusades against the Moslems, the only non-Christians it knew of, was the worst of religious Empires the world has ever known. The worst of it was that it was built in the name of him who had chosen to die an ignominious death on the cross rather than countenance in the least the political ideals of his fellow-believers. Jesus Christ was made, thus, the Kaiser of this Christendom. This has been an irony of fate at its worst. It is a tragedy far greater than the crucifixion of Jesus, for it has meant a continued crucifixion of his spirit at the hands of his own so-called disciples. This has meant, moreover, the crucifixion of tens of thousands of Jews in the course of Christian history, Crusades against the Moslems and the worst of fanaticism and bigotry against the so-called Heathens.

It was against such a system that Luther revolted, an act which required no little heroism on his part. He was made of the stuff of heroes and stood alone for a time against immense odds. This called for courage of an extraordinary kind and he was fully endowed with it. Indeed, there are not many examples in the whole of human history of the rare kind of courage he showed in fighting for a principle which he considered vital to religious life. This heroism of his, however, was of a secular kind, for he fought with the weapons of the very system which he wanted to destroy. He allied himself soon with the secular

power of his country, in consequence of which his revolt, rooted originally in a religious principle, became a political and racial schism. Luther's Protestantism became soon a war-cry between the Teutons and Anglo-Saxons on one side and the Latins on the other. It divided Europe racially for the first time after many centuries in two definite blocks, and cut up the religious unity of Christendom for all time by giving rise to several National Churches in course of time. All this was inherent in the European mentality which was never Christianised in the proper sense of the term. This happened because Luther's and Calvin's conception of Christianity was in no way better than the one they wanted to supplant. It was in some respects worse, for both these Reformers and those who followed them over-emphasized the secular aspects of Christianity almost to the complete exclusion of the spiritual and other-worldly side thereof. The Roman Catholic Church, in spite of all that could be said against it, had never gone so far. In its celibate priesthood, its many orders of monks and nuns, and in its belief in Saints, it had reserves of spiritual life which the leaders of Protestantism not only ignored but did their worst to destroy. It was at the same time decidedly more inter-national than the other. It always possessed a large body of men and women who had transcended the bounds of family life and nationality, and had banded themselves together in a larger family. Protestantism started thus with a serious handicap of its own choosing and making, and it has gone on ever since adding to its destructive power. The very term Protestantism is one of evil significance, connoting negation and destruction, and the fact that even after three or four centuries the Protestants have not only not discarded it but even glorify it, shows the true genius and character of their religion. All this is an integral part of the history of Christianity in Europe, and Protestantism has only accentuated the evil aspects of Roman Catholicism. This shows abundantly that Europe has never been Christian in the proper sense of the term.

In sharp contrast to this Hinduism has never been over-organised or centralised in a single ecclesiastical or politico-religious system. Somehow or other, the Aryan religious thought, whether in Persia or in India, escaped this fate from the start. In all probability Zoroaster was the first great teacher in all the world, who taught that religion was essentially a personal matter between man and God, and that therefore it should be free from coercion of any kind for its spread. This did not mean that Truth should not be preached to people, for he did his best to propagate his faith to others irrespective of race and nationality, a matter in which also he was the first among all the Prophets and Teachers of the world. He, besides, organised his religion in a powerful system, but this never became Religious Imperialism even when the Zoroastrians were at the height of their political power. Rather with a magnanimity unknown in human history, Zoroastrianism followed quite the opposite course at a time when everything was in its favour for becoming an imperial system. Darius, the great Persian Emperor, could have well imposed his faith on the various peoples, the Jews being among them, he conquered along with his conquest of Babylon. He, however, released those who were slaves of his slaves and let them go to their home-lands with rich presents for the restoration of their lands and religious shrines. It is the most remarkable instance of its kind in human history. It was a case of granting full religious and cultural liberty and autonomy to subject peoples. He did not want to impose under any circumstances the group consciousness of his own people on others. He was the truest and best of conquerors because he conquered the hearts of men; his Empire was the best of all because it was one of tolerance and love. It was because of this that the Jewish Prophets spoke of him as the Messiah. In all likelihood, the very Messianic ideal, which played so great a part in later Jewish history, was inspired by his example.

The history of Aryan religious thought and life in Hindustan has run along lines more or less similar to that in Persia. In the



Vedic times the Aryans were extremely group-conscious, and they hated the non-Aryans and their gods with all their heart and strength. They were not, however, politically powerful enough to impose their faith on the original people of the land. Their primary concern was to exterminate them in order to find a safe living-place for themselves, and to justify themselves in their own eyes it was essential for them to differentiate themselves both in race and religion as much as they could from the non-Aryans. This was just what the Jews did towards the people of Canaan when they came from Egypt to Palestine. They have continued to do this all through their history wherever they have gone. Of course there is a difference between their treatment of the Canaanites and of other people amongst whom they have lived. The former they conquered, persecuted and proselytised, while in every other country but Palestine they themselves have remained a persecuted minority. Their group-consciousness has been, however, too strong to allow them to be easily assimilated. It is this alone which has given them their long lease of life in spite of their having remained in different countries under the most adverse of circumstances. This tenacious clinging on their part to their racial and religious consciousness is, indeed, one of the most remarkable facts of history.

The Aryans in India faced a different situation. They came in pretty large numbers in wave after wave of immigration and succeeded in dominating in course of time the non-Aryans throughout the length and breadth of this sub-continent. In the first stages they tried to exterminate the non-Aryans as far as possible, but for various reasons this process seems to have ended pretty soon. When their hold of the land was secure, they began to admit the non-Aryans into the household of their faith as *Sudras*, servants or semi-slaves. The cultural conquest began in earnest after the political one had been assured. Their work in regard to these matters was similar to what has been done by the Christian nations of Europe in America, Africa and Australia and to a



limited extent even in Asia. If they have not been able to do much by way of extermination and political and cultural conquest of the indigeneous people of this last-mentioned continent to the same extent as in the others, it is only because the people thereof have had a civilization much older than that of Europe. Besides, the Asiatics are too many in number to be easily exterminated or conquered. The work of political and cultural conquest, nevertheless, has been going on for the last three or four centuries in many countries of Asia, the latter being carried on largely by means of the Christian Missions.

As regards the cultural conquest of the original peoples of India by the Aryans, it was carried on by the process of their assimilation into the Indo Aryan socio-religious system, which came to be known in course of time as the Varnashrama Dharma. While this work was going on and Manu-Smriti, which was its code of laws, was not even written, there arose, however, a movement in India of much significance. This was something of a new Revelation and it came in the shape of the Upanishads. The doctrine of the Atman came to birth and it made religion essentially a personal matter. A little later there arose two men, or rather super men of the highest type, Mahavira and Gautama Buddha, who taught the infinite value of not only human beings but of every living creature. Under the influence of their teaching, the doctrine of the Atman became more definite and realistic, and associated with the Law of Karma it became profoundly ethical. The doctrine and practice of Ahimsa and Maitri, Non-violence and Compassion, besides, brought in its train a cosmic emotion, which made both Jainism and Buddhism universal in the best sense of the term. These two religions proved to be powerful decentralising forces in the Aryan religious life in India, which was henceforth divided into three channels running side by side. Under Asoka and his successors Buddhism might have become an imperialistic system of religious life and culture, but the great Emperor was too spiritual a person to allow religion to be

abused in this way. What the Persian Emperor Darius had done towards his subject peoples, Asoka did towards all peoples and even animals. It was in his time that there started the marvellous missionary movement of Buddhism outside India, the first of its kind in the history of the world, and be it said to its credit that in the expansion of Buddhism, in the East and the West, North and South, no coercion of any kind has ever been used. This faith is unique in this matter among the great religions of the world, which is all the more remarkable when we remember the fact that it expanded over an area much larger than what has been ever covered by either Christianity or Islam. Later on this expansion itself was a serious bar to its centralisation, apart from the genius and character of the religion itself.

As regards India itself, there came a change in the fortunes of the three religions mentioned above. Vedism, which is the proper name at this stage of Indian history for what we now know as Hinduism, reasserted itself, with the result that its two rival faiths, Jainism and Buddhism, gradually waned in power. This state of things reached its peak in the time of Kumarila Bhatta and Shankaracharya. Under them Vedism and Varnashrama Dharma became all-powerful as a strong socio-religious system. This was the Hindu counterpart of the Roman Catholic Church in Europe, and a number of Roman Catholics and Englishmen of light and leading have paid a high tribute to the caste-system, which is the modern form of the Varnashrama Dharma. Abbe Du Bois spoke of it in his classical work *Hindu Customs and Manners* as "the masterpiece of Hindu legislators." It has grown in the course of ages and centuries, affording thus a remarkable solution of the problem that arose out of the meeting together of peoples of different races and sub-races, each with a culture of its own, in this land. This is a problem special to India and there could not have been found in those early days a better solution of it than the caste-system. The United States of America is the only other country where a similar situation has arisen in modern times,

and the people thereof have not yet been able to meet it in a more satisfactory manner. A kind of embryonic Caste-system is already there, at any rate so far as the relations of the white people with the Negroes, the Red Indians who are divided amongst themselves into scores of small groups, the Mexicans, the Asiatics and the Jews, and of all these among themselves, are concerned. Even the European peoples from different lands, who have flocked to the United States in large numbers, have formed blocks of their own as regards marriage etc. What has happened there in the course of such a short time has been going on in India for many millenia, and the caste-system allowed the incoming waves of immigrant life from outside India and from province to province to flow into easy channels. It gave social, cultural and religious autonomy to every group of people that desired to lead its life in its own way. All that was demanded of each community was that it should respect the autonomy of other communities as it desired its own to be respected. In consequence of this the Hindu Civilization came to possess a social stability extending over a period of more than three thousand years; a phenomenon which is found in no other country except China. Indeed, the Hindu Civilization is not perfect, but that is because no human institution can be such. It has certain drawbacks of its own. Its most serious defect has been its heavy pressure upon certain classes of people and it has made life a little too static. If one were to strike a balance, however, between the advantages and disadvantages accruing from this system on the whole, there is not the least doubt that the former outweigh the latter by far. It is true it has formed a hierarchy with some groups always at the top and some always at the bottom. But the top-most layer of this hierarchy, viz., the Brahmins, attained their supremacy only by denying themselves the right of entering into competition with other communities in the struggle of life for worldly ends and by accepting voluntary poverty as their portion in life. They have had to depend even for their daily bread on the people of the castes below them. This arrangement put a high premium

on spiritual values in the organisation of society. In all probability no other society in the history of mankind has been organised on such a basis.

Besides, no pre-meditated plan was accepted and followed in regard to the arrangement of the relative places of different groups or castes in the Hindu Hierarchy, except perhaps in the earliest stages of the Indo Aryan life. Each group found its own level and place in accordance with its moral and mental capacity. With the lapse of time spiritual and cultural values became increasingly important, and the castes and the occupations which were considered lower at one time came to be looked upon as higher. A notable example of this is found in the recognition of a number of *Vaishya* castes as higher than the Kshatriyas. This happened largely in virtue of their giving up the use of meat in their diet. Thus entire groups could change their positions provided they attained a higher cultural and spiritual level.

The caste-system in its earlier stages in India represented the racial and military supremacy of the Aryans over the non-Aryans. The very term *Varnashrama* signifies this. The preference given to white skin all over the land even to-day, amounting almost to an apotheosis in many cases, shows the great hold of the racial conception over the mind of the people of the land. Varnashrama Dharma was thus an embodiment of the Aryan imperial idea. This came to be modified in course of time by the rise of both Jainism and Buddhism as has been already mentioned. It was, however, revived again by Kumarila and Shankara, and for a time it remained very powerful. Breaches were then made in this system by the great Vaishnava Acharyas and Saints. Vallabha was the last of these Acharyas and as such he went further than any other in his repudiation of the Varnashrama Dharma and "works" i. e. ritual ceremonies which went along with this Dharma as an integral part thereof. This was a serious revolt against orthodoxy, and since he unfurled his flag



in Benares, the centre of Brahminism, it became all the more significant. It is in this that there lies a close parallel between Vallabha's work and that of Luther.

We have entered into this rather long digression to make the relative backgrounds of both these Reformers clearer. Luther had to work against a system which was far more secular and political than the one that opposed Vallabha. In consequence he had to take shelter under the protecting arm of Princes and political powers, which made his movement as much political as religious. Granting to some extent the necessity for this kind of work on his part in the structure of the European or the Christian society itself, we can not help saying that it lay partly in the personality of Luther himself. He gave a decidedly secular turn to the Reformation because he was essentially a secular person. It is in this that there lies the great difference between him and Vallabha. Compared to the latter, he was almost coarse and even brutal. His extremely violent attitude towards the Roman Catholic Church, his inhumanity towards the Anabaptists and the Peasants in Germany, and his attitude towards the Jews, which was no better than that of the Nazis of the present day, bear ample testimony to this. In spite of all the emphasis that he put on the grace of God as the sole means of salvation for human beings, his Christianity was far more of the Old Testament type than the one he wanted to supplant or even destroy. It was not even that, for he had much more in common with the Heroes of the Teutons than with the Saints of the Catholic Church or the Prophets of the Old Testament. Luther was perhaps the first father of the modern European spirit which, even at its best, is but a very dubious product. Carlyle, in his *Heroes and Hero-worship* pays Luther a high tribute without being aware of the full implications thereof. He says : " But Protestantism has not died yet, that I hear of ! Protestantism, if we will look, has in these days produced its Goethe, its Napoleon, German Literature and the French Revolution; rather considerable signs of life ! Nay, at bottom,



what else is there alive but Protestantism ! ” To the list given here we might well add Anglo-Saxon Imperialism, Industrial Capitalism of Europe and America, Nationalism and even Nazism, as the legitimate products of Protestantism. No wonder Luther’s religious spirit exhausted itself in negative and destructive attitudes and activities, and his doctrine of grace was largely a negation of that of “ works.”

In sharp contrast to this, in the work of Vallabha, protest played only a minor part, and it was directed chiefly against the negations of Mayavada, the philosophy of illusion of Shankara. Both his Brahmavada and Pusti Marga were as positive as religion has ever been, and he preached the Gospel of Life and more Life which Pusti means. He developed all the positive elements of the Bhagavata Dharma that had been given expression to before his time, and integrated them into a well-knit and coherent system, constructing therewith a new Way for the people to follow. He passed the last years of his life, in fact all the years of his maturity, in making this Path as easy and attractive as possible both intellectually and emotionally, and in making it as firm as possible by basing it on the Scriptures. This in itself was a unique piece of work, such as has fallen to the lot of few men to do.

We have already seen how he raised his standard of Brahmavada as against Mayavada in Benares, and what opposition he met with there. In his public controversies with the orthodox Pundits and the protagonists of Mayavada, he was a match for them all, and he succeeded in establishing his position as an Acharya of much significance. Some people became his disciples even. The opposition, however, continued in one form or another, making the atmosphere of the city anything but congenial to him for his work. He was not militant by nature, and wanted to devote himself, besides, to more constructive work, which was that of organising a new Church. Accordingly he changed his place

of residence and came to Adel, which was situated near the conjunction of the two most sacred rivers of India, Ganga (Ganges) and Yamuna, not far from Allahabad. Because of its close proximity to these rivers, this place had special attractions for Vallabha. To him the waters of Yamuna were the holiest, since Krishna had lived and played on its banks and bathed and washed himself in it. Adel was a village, and had, as has been said already, three kinds of Tulsi plant, giving the place an additional sanctity. It is said to have been surrounded by groves and forests full of natural beauty, which may have been an additional reason why he selected the place for his residence. Vallabha was a lover of nature as is evident from the fact that the traditions concerning his pilgrimages abound with the mention of beautiful places where he halted and read the Bhagavata-Purana to his disciples. Another testimony to this is furnished by a large number of *Bethakas* raised in the midst of beautiful surroundings.

It was this small place, Adel, which remained the home of Vallabha from now onwards to the end of his days, a period of at least about twenty years. It was from here that he went out on his preaching tours and visits to different parts of the country, especially Vraja-land. Most of his time, however, seems to have been passed in writing his great works and in teaching his disciples the secrets of the new faith. His fame had spread far and wide and people came to him from various quarters to seek light and knowledge. Some of these were eminent men and they helped him much in the building up of the new Church. We have dealt with these in a chapter by itself, devoted to the relationship that existed between them and Vallabha, and to their activities.

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## CHAPTER XII

### **Vallabha Preaches His Gospel**

Now that Vallabha had settled down, he devoted himself seriously to the task of building up a Sampradaya or Church in accordance with the principles that he had found to be true. He looked upon this work as a mission entrusted to his care by God Himself and he devoted to it all his time and talents. He had found a new Way of Salvation, which he wanted to preach and make easily available to all and sundry. To this end he confined himself principally to two kinds of activities, viz., the creation of religious literature and the building up of a religious community. Since we have dealt with the first of these elsewhere in the present work, we shall give some account of the latter here. Unfortunately we are again faced with many difficulties, for not only is there no connected account of Vallabha's activities in this period of his life, but all the material that is available is scattered widely in the stories of the lives of his disciples. There is a notable book of the name *Stories of Eighty-four Vaishnavas*, which came to be written more than two generations after Vallabha. In this book, which is considered a kind of classic by the Church of Vallabha, as it shows how the ideals of devotion and conduct set by Vallabha were realised by many men and women, we have just the barest of outlines of their lives or rather their spiritual experiences, and we have gleaned our account largely from them.

It seems that by the time Vallabha had settled down in Adel, he had formed a group of his own disciples, and that some

of them lived constantly with him. Most of his followers carried on their work, whatever their occupation, for it was of the essence of the new Way that people should be householders and maintain themselves by the labour of their hands or brain. There was no room in it for *Sannyasis* or *Sadhus*. Some of them had means of their own, and being contented with whatever they had, they devoted themselves more or less exclusively to the service of the new Church. The number of such people was small and it has been so all along since Vallabha's time. In fact this Church has had no missionaries as such. It has grown to its present proportions, which are pretty large, almost without any special efforts made for its expansion. People were added to it everywhere at first by the contagious example of the life of individual disciples and later on by the group-life which the movement exhibited. Vallabha believed in the "election" of souls by God, and only those who were drawn by God joined his Church. All that one needed to do was to lead his or her life according to the ideal set by him and the rest would be done by God Himself. No doubt the temples or *Havelis* as they are called in this Sampradaya, have acted as centres of attraction to the people, but these were non-existent in Vallabha's time. Even these, as they have grown in course of time, are of a peculiar kind and have not much in common with other Hindu temples. They are private or semi-private places of worship.

Vallabha's own position as a preacher or missionary was different from that of most of his followers. His reputation as a Teacher had spread far and wide, so that wherever he went, people came to him attracted by his name. Some came to him with a desire to enter into controversy as regards the truth of his teaching, and a few of these became his disciples. In this way some eminent men joined his Church and gave it strength and power. The most notable of these were Suradas, the great poet, and Kumbhandas, who too was a poet. Both these men helped much in the creation of some hundreds of hymns and songs of

praise and adoration, which in themselves became a source of great attraction. In these songs we find a clear expression of many of the deepest and most beautiful sentiments and feelings which the new faith evoked.

There was, however, one thing which helped the spread of the faith to a large extent from the beginning. This was the reading and expounding of the *Bhagavata Purana* in seven days called the *Saptaha* of Bhagavata. Vallabha is said to have adopted the practice of doing this from the earliest days of his pilgrimage. It is said that even during his first tour round India, he read the Purana in this way in a number of places. There is no doubt that this practice of his began early in his life and was continued to the end of his days. These *Saptahas*, whether of the *Bhagavata* or the *Ramayana*, are a peculiarly Hindu institution. The idea underlying it is to study a particular Scripture in a deeply religious spirit in as short a time as possible. Several hours are devoted every day for a full week to the reading and expounding by a suitable teacher of the book in hand, which makes the study thereof intense indeed. It amounts almost to a religious exercise for many members of the audience, and the work is carried on in the spirit of a 'retreat.' It is even more than this, for such *Saptahas* become religious festivals which can be joined by any one at any time during the period while they last. These *Saptahas* take place often in private houses and become events of much significance for the families which hold them. As for the study of a Scripture thus conducted, under a proper teacher it can become not only very helpful spiritually but profoundly interesting. The various Puranas and the Ramayana, whether the original one of Valmiki or the one in Hindi by Tulsidas, are eminently fitted for this purpose. The Bhagavata Purana is perhaps unique in this, for it seems to have been written with this very object in view. In the beginning of the book we are told that it contains the teaching of Shukadeva, the son of the great sage Vyasa, given to King Parikshita, who had only seven days to live in the world.



To hold a Saptaha is no easy affair. It demands a teacher who, besides being a man of much learning and high character, should have a physique such as can stand the strain of speaking continuously for eight or ten hours a day for a full week. Such a combination is not easy to find. It is, moreover, an expensive affair if a Saptaha is held at a private place, for besides giving a handsome donation to the preacher one is expected to invite a number of relations and friends from outside to join the festival.

Vallabha's *Saptahas* of the Bhagavata Purana were, however, held on his own, which exempted them from costs of any kind. He forbade even his disciples to conduct such Saptahas for payment of any kind for the purpose. There is a touching story of a Pundit, who refused to take any money for such services in spite of his extreme poverty. We give it here as it well shows the atmosphere in which the new Sampradaya grew. It is as follows :

"Once upon a time the *Acharya* (Vallabha) was in Kanouja. While there, he started his daily reading of the Bhagavata and said in the beginning that since this Purana was the best of all, it should be read daily, for there is no other book which helped the increase of Bhakti so much as it did. He added that those who knew how to read it publicly, should do so without any desire for reward in the shape of money. This was heard by a Pundit called Padmanabhadas, who lived by his public readings called the *Kathas* of the Puranas. He immediately made up his mind to take no money whatsoever for such work. The result of this vow was that he was soon reduced to extreme poverty. His penurious condition can be realised from the fact that since he had nothing else to offer to the Image at his house, he served it with the husks of the oil seed called *tila*, saying to himself and to the Image that it was this rich dish or that. He had settled down at Adel in order that he might have the constant company of the Acharya. In course of time his poor condition

came to be known to all the Vaishnavas of the place and they mentioned the matter to Vallabha. The latter then went to his place and told him that what he had said about not taking any payment for the public reading of the Scriptures applied only to the teaching of the Bhagavata and not to that of the other books, and added that Padmanabhādas might continue to conduct his *Kathas* of other Scriptures

“Vallabha then went home and asked his mother to send some provisions to the family of Padmanabhadas. This was done accordingly, but the latter returned the gifts back saying that it was not proper to eat the food given by one's *Guru*. He and his wife then went to Kanouja and kept serving God in the way they had been doing latterly. One day his wife not being able to bear the strain of such hardship any longer said to him : “We are now reduced to the last stages of penury. We must have some money for our maintenance and for the offering of food to the Image at our place. Why not then do some work as a Priest ?” To this Padmanabhadas replied : “I can not do any work as a priest, for to be such is to depend on other people. If I were to take such a step now, the people of the world would find fault with our faith and say that the Church which I have joined has reduced me to such a condition that I have been forced to degrade myself from the position of a religious teacher to that of a priest. It is far better to beg a little from the public in general day by day, and I can do this as a Brahmin without losing my self-respect in any way. Besides, it is not proper for us to be anxious about what we shall eat or drink or put on, for God Himself takes care of those who love and serve Him.” He did this accordingly and they lived for many years serving God with all their heart and soul.”

In a book called *Sri Vallabha Digvijaya* the advice of Padmanabhadas given to his wife is given in a few verses in Sanskrit, which roughly translated stand as follows :

“ Do not be anxious about what you shall eat or put on. Love Sri Krishna constantly. Dost thou not know that it was because Draupdi had loved Krishna in this manner, that God provided her with cloth after cloth ( when the attempt was made by her enemies to make her naked ) ?

2 The Vaishnavas take thought of food and clothes in vain, because how can He, who is called Vishvambhara ( One Who fills the entire universe ) be indifferent to the needs of His own devotees ?

3 Are not the clothes torn on the way ? Do not the trees that feed others give alms ? Are the rivers dried up ? Are all the dens occupied ? Does not God protect those who seek His refuge ? Why should we then be anxious about clothes, or food, or drink, or house, or body ? These things are available easily. Why do then the learned people flatter the rich who have become blind with wicked pride of wealth ?

4 God is never pleased with gifts of things that one may offer Him, because the one thing that pleases Him is the humility of His devotees.

These verses, which evidently originated with the author of the Sanskrit book mentioned above, show the spirit in which the movement of Vallabha tried to realise its ideals at its best. Such words have been addressed at all times by religious teachers to their followers, but usually they are counsels of perfection given to those who would lead the Sadhu life and not to householders. In the present case the ideal of such a life is placed before householders with families of their own, and herein lies the peculiarity of some forms of Vaishnavism. It was only such men as Padmanabhadas who were fitted to teach the *Bhagavata Dharma* and the *Bhagavata* publicly. This was Vallabha's ideal of teaching his Way to the people and he realised it in his own life.

It is no wonder; then, that the teaching of the *Bhagavata* became in Vallabha's hands a most potent means of spreading his Gospel. To him this Purana was the Gospel of Gospels. Very early in his life, he had come to look upon it as the last word of God, as the Scripture which not only contained the essence of the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Bhagavad-Gita and the Brahma Sutras, but even fulfilled them. As such he studied and mastered it as perhaps few men have ever done. He then began to read it constantly before his own disciples and to give public readings thereof. His high character, deep devotion, vast learning and eloquence were all put to the service of preaching and teaching this Gospel to the people, and it was natural that they should flock in large numbers to hear him. Probably no man of his eminence taught the *Bhagavata* for so long a period and in the way he did. It was a privilege and a treat to hear him read and expound this book of books, and no less a person than Sri Chaitanya himself is said to have given an entire monsoon season, called *Chaturmasa*, to the hearing of Vallabha's exposition of this book as given in his commentary called *Sri Subodhini*.

It was through his teaching of the *Bhagavata* that Vallabha secured a number of his disciples. One of these deserves special mention here. His name is Madhava Bhatta. He came to Gokula in the company of a very able Pundit of Kashmere, called Keshava Bhatta, a noted teacher and author belonging to the Church of Nimbarka. Vallabha was then giving his public reading of the *Bhagavata* in this place. Having known his reputation as a great teacher, Keshava Bhatta came to hear Vallabha with all his disciples. He found the exposition so interesting and instructive that he continued to go to the meeting for many days. Madhava Bhatta, who was in this company, became so intensely interested in the teaching of Vallabha, that he began to sit in the company of Vallabha's disciples, who sat in a group by themselves. In course of time, Keshava Bhatt left Gokula, but before he did this, knowing the strong inclination of Madhava Bhatta to remain with



Vallabha, he presented him to the latter. Madhava Bhatta was then initiated by Vallabha and taught the essence of the new Way.

Madhava Bhatta returned to his place after some time and worshipped God with a single-minded devotion. While here he is said to have worked a miracle. A rich man lost his only son, a young man, who left a widow behind him. This event made the father most disconsolate, and he cried and wandered about like a mad man. Seeing his extreme grief, some one told him that all his crying out was of no avail, but that God might do something for him through Madhava Bhatta if he approached him. Accordingly the man went to him and entreated him to give life to his son. Upon this Madhava Bhatta went to the sanctuary and prayed the Deity saying :

"To have the pity of the merciful and the great for others in their miseries is becoming to You alone, Who art the Redeemer of the whole Universe."

The Deity heard his prayer and told him that the son of the man would be brought to life again. This message was given to the bereaved father, who would not believe it and continued to cry out all the more. Very soon somebody came to him from his home saying that his son had revived and he went rejoicing much and thanking Madhava Bhatta.

The performance of this miracle, however, made Madhava Bhatta very uneasy and it caused much fear in his heart as to its future results. He knew that his fame as a miracle-worker would spread far and wide soon, and that all those who were ill or miserable would flock to him seeking his help. Accordingly he left the place soon in secret and went to Adel, the village where Vallabha lived. He lived here from this time all his days and worked as a kind of secretary to the latter. It was to him that



Vallabha dictated his commentary on the *Bhagavata Purana*. He was one of the foremost disciples of Vallabha.

The attitude of Madhava Bhatta towards miracles, described above, is that of the entire movement of Vallabha. A few miracles are said to have been worked by the great Teacher himself and by some of his followers, but they are few and far between. The Vaishnavas of this Church never glory in miracles as such, and they consider their faith in them or in the power to perform them as derogatory to their faith in God. In their eyes the miracle of miracles is the realization of the *Lila*, the gracious sport of God as portrayed in the life of Sri Krishna given in the *Bhagavata*, or a personal experience of and fellowship with God in such a way that God talks to them and eats and drinks things that they have offered to Him. Innumerable stories of this kind are related in connection with several devotees of this *Sampradaya*, and it is in them that we find the innermost heart of the movement of Vallabha. The realization of God's love and participation in his life through His grace forms the chief objective of the faith and devotion of Vallabha and his followers, and as compared with this everything else is of secondary importance.

The *Bhagavata Purana* was of the utmost help in securing the attainment of this end to Vallabha. To him, as we have said above, it was the Scripture of Scriptures, the crown and fulfillment of all the Scripture that had appeared before. This was no new discovery on Vallabha's part. He had been anticipated in this by both Madhva and Nimbarka among the Acharyas that preceded him and by a number of great devotees of different provinces. They all attributed its authorship to Vyasa, the great Sage, and as such it had its full weight of Scriptural authority with them. The orthodox Vaishnavas even to-day consider a doubt expressed about this authorship as rank heresy. Modern critical scholarship, however, which studies the problems of the date and authorship

of a book from many points of view, has definitely come to the conclusion that the Bhagavata as it is to-day, can not have been written before the present Christian era began. The book itself says that it was written by the great Sage himself as the last of all the Puranas. This means one thing to be sure, viz., that it is later than the other Puranas, which fact alone would bring down its date to the post-Buddhistic period. The first indirect testimony to the existence of this Purana is found in a Jain book dated 454 A. D., and it is indeed very significant that neither Shankara nor Ramanuja even mention it, which may be due to the fact that it did not have much vogue in their time. The latter Acharya is full of praise for the Vishnu Purana, and since the Bhagavata is in many ways a larger and more complete edition of the same, he would not have failed to notice it had he known of its existence. This is a problem of critical scholarship, and since it is not the province of the present work to decide such matters, we shall leave it here as it is. Besides, to our mind the date and the authorship of a book do not necessarily determine the nature thereof as many orthodox people fondly imagine. We believe that God speaks to-day as much as He ever did before, and what He may say to us in the present moment may well go far beyond any Scriptures of the past.

The Bhagavata Purana seems to have been written in all likelihood in South India, especially in the Tamil-land. A number of descriptions given in the book of places etc., point to the South, and even *Gopuram*, which is especially a southern product, is mentioned. The book almost glorifies the South as for example in the following passage:

“ Men born in the Krita, Treta and Dwapara Yugas wished to take birth in this Kali Yuga ( Dark Age ), because they knew that in this period would be born great souls devoted to Narayana. These souls would be thinly scattered in various places, but in

the Dravida-land-they would be found in numbers, living by the side of such rivers as the Tamraparni, Kritamala, Payasvini and Kaveri the holy."

The type of Bhakti emphasized by the Bhagavata is, besides, of the Dravidian kind made familiar by the Alwars. This had taken hold of the people more and more, and this Purana represents an attempt to centre it round Sri Krishna. This marks a further stage of evolution of the Bhakti-Marga as it had developed in the south. The essence of this Bhakti is that it is profoundly emotional, passionate and ecstatic in contrast to that which found expression in the Bhagavad-Gita and in the teachings of so great a teacher of Bhakti as Ramanuja. The devotion as taught by the latter was largely intellectual and contemplative, and as such it did not touch some of the deepest springs of life as this did. In all probability the difference between the two lies in the fact that in the Bhakti of the Dravidian type, the realization of God's presence was much greater than in the other. As has been mentioned elsewhere in the present work, the Dravidians were far less race-conscious than the Aryans, and probably their sufferings at the hands of the latter had made them truly humble before God. They were indeed poorer in spirit than their conquerors and hence were nearer to the Kingdom of God. They were poor both in spirit and in the things of this world, meek and humble, and this helped them much in surrendering themselves readily to God. This was rewarded by God with the greatest of blessings, which was nothing less than a vision of and deep communion and fellowship with Himself. This turned the devotees into Saints. It is worth noting that the ideal of saintly life was first realized in the South, from where it spread gradually in the North. In all likelihood the number of Saints in the South has been far greater than those of the North, a fact which becomes all the more significant when we remember that the North of India is three times as big as the South.

The writing of the Bhagavata-Purana represents an attempt to centre this Dravidian type of Bhakti, which is deep and intense, emotional and ecstatic, in Sri Krishna, and whoever wrote the book was indeed a most remarkable religious genius. What Mazzini said of the author of the Gospel of St. John, the most spiritual of all the Gospels, viz., that whosoever wrote it was St. John, may well be applied to the author of this work. It may truly be said of him that he was a kind of Vyasa. He had realized the nature of Bhakti as perhaps few had done before him, and he found in Sri Krishna the Person to whom such Bhakti could be offered as to none else. Even as regards Krishna's life, he made a clear distinction between one phase and another, considering the life of Krishna as a Child and a Boy to be more suitable for his purpose.

This interest in the *Bala-Lila* and *Kishore-Lila* as contrasted with the *Prandha-Lila* and *Raja-Lila*, the sport of Krishna in his adult life and as King, was a new feature in Hindu religious life. It is found for the first time in *Harivamsha* and the *Vishnu Purana*, both of which are certainly earlier than the *Bhagavata*. It was perhaps before they appeared that the poet Bhasa wrote a drama called *Bala-Charitra*, portraying therein the life of Krishna as a child and a boy. Earlier than that there are no literary traditions in which such *Bala-Lila* plays any important part. This led formerly some scholars, both of the East and of the West, including no less a person than the late Dr. Sir Ramkrishna Bhandarkar, to express the opinion that some of the legends concerning the childhood of Krishna may have been borrowed from some of the stories concerning Jesus Christ. Dr. Bhandarkar says the following in regard to this matter in *The Indian Antiquary*, Jan. 1912 :

“ About the first century of the Christian era, the boy-god of a wandering tribe of cow-herds of the name Abhiras came to be identified with Vasudeva. In the course of their wandering



eastward from Syria or Asia Minor, they brought with them, probably traditions of the birth of Christ in a stable, the massacre of the Innocents etc., and the name Christ itself. The name became recognised as Krishna, as this word is often pronounced by some Indians as Kristo or Kusto. And thus the traditional legends brought by the Abhiras became engrafted on the story of Vasudeva Krishna of India."

Other scholars, both Eastern and Western, have denied the indebtedness of India to Syria in this matter. Apart from other things, it is very unlikely, according to Dr. Bhandarkar's own showing, that the Abhiras tribe could have been in Syria about the middle of the first century or a little later when the stories concerning the childhood of Jesus Christ began to float about, if its "boy-god" came to be identified in India about the first century of the Christian era." Besides, a number of scholars are of the opinion that the oldest picture of the mother suckling the child representing Yasoda and Krishna, is earlier in date than any found in Syria or among the Christians elsewhere. Under these circumstances the borrowing may well have been on the other side, but even about this nothing could be said with any certainty.

Whatever this be, there is no doubt that this recognition of God as a child, whether in India or in Syria, or in both independently, was a momentous step forward in the religious life of the world. It was easy to recognise God as a King or a Teacher, but that He should condescend to be helpless as a Babe and a Child and depend on others for everything, showed God's Humanity at its highest. As such He touched human life in its tenderest spots. Krishna in the role of King and Teacher, as depicted in the Mahabharata, had shown extraordinary power and wisdom and played often the part of Providence, but there was a great distance between him and even Arjuna who came nearest to him as a friend. He manifests himself there more as a Superman,



though not of the type which Nietzsche has glorified, and love and grace are not always his predominating qualities. It may be said without exaggeration that Justice, stern Justice at that, is as much in evidence in the Mahabharata including the Bhagavad-Gita as Love, and Krishna appears therein as more of a Judge than as a Redeemer.

Krishna of the Mahabharata stood thus too high for the common man and still more for the poor, the illiterate and the down-trodden to approach him easily. These people wanted a Saviour and Redeemer whom they could handle, touch and embrace with loving familiarity and thus satisfy their deepest cravings. This need of theirs was fully met by Bala-Krishna, the Child-Krishna. He became henceforth the Saviour of the poor, and the *Bhagavata*, which shows Krishna in this aspect of his life more fully than in any other, became the Gospel of the poor and the humble. This is its chief glory and it surpasses in this anything that has been ever written in any part of the world excepting the Gospels of the Christian religion. This feature of Krishna's life was recognised even earlier than the time of the *Bhagavata*, as we see from the following verses in the *Vishnu Purana* :

"Seeing the great miracle of the holding up of the Mt. Govardhana by Krishna on his finger, the Gopas feeling very happy said to Krishna : "Oh, Thou blessed one, Thou hast protected us and our cows from the great danger of destruction that threatened us by this wonderful act of Thine. Indeed, this unparalleled work of Thine which is supernatural and divine does not fit in with Thy birth in the tribe of the Gopas who are looked down upon by others. Please tell us what the secret of it is. Thou hast destroyed the fearful serpent Kali in the water of the river Yamuna, destroyed the wicked devil Pralamba and hast held up the Mt. Govardhana. Seeing all this we do not know who Thou art in truth. O, Thou Krishna, who hast such immeasurable

strength and power! We swear by Thy feet that seeing all these deeds of Thine, we feel sure that Thou art no human being. O Keshava, greatly Thou lovest this Gokula, which is full of insignificant women and children, and Thy deeds are such as can not be done even by the gods. O Thou mighty Krishna, these works of Thine, even though Thou art a mere child, Thy mighty power and Thy birth among us who are low in the scale of society, when we think of all this, we wonder whether Thou art a god or some other being apart from men, or one of our own brethren. Tell us this; we pray Thee to do so."

Hearing this Krishna was silent for a short time and manifesting then his loving-indignation said to them these words

"If you are not ashamed of me because of these works of mine and if you think that they are to be admired, why should you think of this question as to who I am at all? *If you have love for me and if I am praiseworthy, then look upon me as your brother. I am not a god or any kind of superior being. I am born only as one of yourself and a brother to you : therefore you should not imagine any such things about me.*" Book V, Chapter XIII. (The italics are ours.)

It is in the words italicised here that the meaning of the *Bala-Lila* of Krishna lies. The act of gracious condescension underlying this identification with a people who were in all probability not Aryans and were considered "low", on the part of Krishna, is unique in the history of religion.

The second phase of Krishna's life, known as the *Kishore-Lila*, his sport as a boy, goes still further in this act of condescension. Therein he identifies himself with the Gopis, the women of the tribe in the midst of which he was now living. These were undoubtedly looked down upon as inferior to the men of the tribe. This was, indeed, a greater departure than the one mentioned above. What Jesus Christ did in the case of one woman, viz., the

Samaritan woman, by way of revealing himself fully to her, was done here to a whole troop of them by Krishna. In all likelihood, there is an element of idealization of both Krishna and Christ in regard to this aspect of their self-revelation. Without a doubt Krishna is the most idealised person in the world, just as Gita is said to be "the most idealised book in the world."

We must refer here to what is called the *Rasa-Lila* of Krishna with the Gopis, which is the culmination of his communion and fellowship with the latter in the eyes of his followers, and a perfect eye-sore to the critics of Krishna-worship, especially the Christian missionaries. This Lila is described probably for the first time in the *Vishnu Purana*, and therein it is only a dance of young people with just a slight erotic touch about it. It is not, however, central in the eyes of the author of this book, and he mentions it as only one of the many things done by Krishna. In the *Harivamsha*, this *Lila* goes a step further, and the sex-act is referred to as having taken place. The *Bhagavata* repeats this. Now in connection with this matter it must be remembered that Krishna at the time when this *Lila* is said to have been performed by him was only eleven years old. Moreover whatever is said of Krishna in these three books, the *Vishnu Purana*, the *Harivamsha* and the *Bhagavata*, is described as having been done by him as God Incarnate. This act, therefore, is only symbolic of the intense unity between the Gopis and Krishna, and the Gopis themselves represent the devotees of God. We have dealt with this subject elsewhere in the present work, and so we shall leave it here for the present.

We might, however, add this, viz., that the idea underlying this *Lila*, described in the *Rasa-Panchadhyaya* (Book X, chapters 29-33), is to idealise Love, Romantic Love to the highest extent, or rather to show it in its original, ideal form. There is, besides, a definite purpose behind this description, which is no other than to so fill the imagination of the ordinary man, even the sensual man, with Krishna and his *Lila*, that his nature

may be transformed. The author himself says this in verse 36, chapter 33. This *Rasa-Lila* is described in this manner in order that every man or woman who hears it may take the place of the Gopis in relation to Krishna, who is no other than God himself to the author. There is danger undoubtedly in this portrayal, and much danger at that, and it has led to abuses also. It must be said at the same time that no other being, described in the secular or religious literature of the world, has so filled the imagination of all kinds of people as Sri Krishna. This seems to have been the main objective in the writing of some of the literature concerning Krishna, for it is said again and again that even if one bears in his mind towards Krishna feelings of dire vengeance and enmity, allowing himself thereby to be dominated by thoughts about him, he gets his salvation if he passes away with them in his mind. There may be an element of exaggeration in this, but it shows what aim the authors of such books had set before themselves. Ethical considerations were not primary with them, for they knew that God could do nothing that was evil, and that human beings had no right to judge Him under any circumstances. They also said that whatever was done by God was not to be imitated by man in any case, and that all we need to do is to give our unquestioning devotion to Him. That these aims set before themselves by those writers have been largely realized is undoubted, for the personality of Krishna has been all-pervading among his followers to an extent that is true of no other Prophet or religious Teacher. The chief reason for this lies in the fact that Krishna's life is full of human interest. He touches human life at more points than any other Prophet, a matter which is brought out in full in the portrayals of his life as a babe, as a boy, as a lover, as a friend, as a king and as a teacher. If this is true of his life as a whole, it is still more so in regard to what is said about him in the *Bhagavata Purana*. In connection with this, the following from the pen of a Roman Catholic author, the Rev. Dr. P. Johannes, in his booklet on Vallabha in *Christ through the Vedanta* series is worth quoting :



... " This dependence on souls is prominent in the behaviour of Krishna and may perhaps explain to us the mysterious attraction Krishna exercises on the Hindu mind. Krishna is God making Himself the slave of His devotees. Although the Master of heaven and earth, he reposes on the lap of Yasoda, allows himself to be bound to the wheel of a chariot and condescends to dance with the Gopis. These are but few examples but the whole tenth chapter abounds in illustrations. We may wonder at the familiarities of Krishna with his devotees, but the Hindus love them. They like the God who, with absolute condescension, comes down to their level and makes himself their little servant, friend and protector, and appearing even as a child, delights in hide-and-seek play with his devotees. They prefer being admitted to this play of Krishna, to the joys one may derive from the contemplation of the most enticing attributes of the Godhead. For in this play the character of God which shows Him to be for us comes out most emphatically. In the contemplation of the attributes of God we enjoy His greatness, His transcendence and dignity, we wonder at the infinitely distant, but in playing with Krishna we apprehend the infinitely near-infininitely near because our love for Him has brought Him down to our level. Hence it is that the Hindus have lifted Krishna beyond all the other gods and beyond Bhagavata and Brahma Himself. Bhagavata and Brahma only remain in order to show from what an infinite distance our love has dragged down our God.

" Through this dependence on his devotees, God seems to have alienated for our sake His most divine attribute : His very liberty. To each devotee God says : " Thou art my God and I only long to treat Thee as such, command and I shall obey, lead on and I shall follow, I am thy means. As thou hast consecrated to me all thou art and all thou hast, so I consecrate to thee and put at thy disposal all I am and all I have. As I have led thee on by my will, now I wait for thy will to be led on, wherever thou likest. "



The *Bhagavata Purana* is the Gospel of such loving and gracious condescension on the part of God, and Krishna's foster-mother Yasoda and the Gopis respond to it in full. This was a new orientation of the idea of *Bhakti*, for henceforth love, tender and feminine love was considered to be of the essence of the love for God. Spontaneous, self-giving love is more natural to women than to men, because of which they were recognised to be nearer the Kingdom of God or rather God Himself than men. As early as the *Vishnu Purana* the *Sudras* and the women, both of whom were hitherto looked down upon as inferior beings, were spoken of as "the blessed," more so than others including even the Brahmins. The *Bhagavata Purana* carries the idea of the blessedness of woman in the eyes of God a stage further. This was one of the greatest measures of social reform in Hindu life, but it was only incidentally so, for the authors of these Puranas had their eyes set solely on the redemption of souls. Among women too, it was the illiterate and unsophisticated milkmaids of a semi-civilized tribe that came closer to God than the wives of the Rishis and the Brahmins. The *Bhagavata Purana* brought thus the Kingdom of God to the commonest man and woman, and all that was required on the part of human souls was that they should be divested of all their clothes in the form of conventions, whether religious or social, and stand before God in pure nakedness of their nature, which is divine in its origin. This was the greatest charter of freedom, of spiritual freedom, that was ever given in India, and it was no wonder if people flocked to make this divine freedom their own. Both Vallabha and Chaitanya preached this larger Gospel, in all probability for the first time, the former in the West and the latter in the East of India, and it fell like showers of rain on parched soil. The ground had been prepared for it by much that had gone before, especially the teachings of the Vaishnava Acharyas and Saints and books like the *Gita Govinda* of Jayadeva. Even the *Bhagavata Purana* was not unknown in these parts. It was, however, due to both these great men that the *Bhakti* of the *Bhagavata* came to be preached on a large scale from one end of India

to the other just above South India. The waters of this type of *Bhakti* were gathered together in the Vraja district the homeland of Krishna's childhood and boyhood, and from there they divided themselves in two broad streams, one flowing eastward and the other westward, through the spiritual genius and character of Sri Chaitanya and Vallabhacharya. Between these two, if there is any difference in this matter, it lies in the fact that Vallabha's dependence on the *Bhagavata* was, if any thing, a little more exclusive. The *Bhagavata Purana* became thus, in the hands of Vallabha, a most potent instrument in preaching his Gospel of Bhakti and spreading his Church.

## CHAPTER XIII

### Vallabha's Character

The thing that has struck us the most in our study of the life and character of Vallabha is the fact that he was an extremely normal person. To begin with, he had a remarkably good physique. This is but too evident from the long and arduous journeys he made all over India for a period extending over almost two decades. He started on his pilgrimages while he was a boy of tender age and continued to go about, whether for the purpose of pilgrimage or for preaching, almost to the end of his days. He travelled in all seasons and in such differing climes, varying from extreme heat to intense cold, as those of sub-tropical South India and the Himalayas. He could not have borne the immense strain that such wandering to and fro involved but for his being endowed with an iron constitution and nerves of steel. Our admiration for his physique grows still more in view of the fact that he made all these journeys on foot and that too without sandals or shoes. To move about in this manner from place to place and province to province in drenching rain or scorching heat or benumbing cold, for a period of twenty years at least, without any certainty of finding a proper place of accommodation at the end of one's daily march, was a feat of unusual physical power of which not many people are capable.

This normality of his is equally evident in his mental powers. He possessed a most powerful intellect the working of which he never allowed to be interfered with by his equally

powerful feelings or imagination. This is all the more remarkable in view of the fact that he established a *Sampradaya*, in which emotions play a most prominent part. He offers us in this, as we have said elsewhere, the strongest of contrasts to Sri Chaitanya, his great contemporary. In spite of all the bias of his mind and soul towards Bhakti, he judges everything by the dry light of his intellect and constructs, a remarkable system of philosophy and theology by the sole means of the latter. It is true he places his intellect at the service of what he considers to be the Revelation from God, and in this if he errs at all, he does so in the company of all the great Acharyas of India. To do this was in their eyes true freedom of mind, and any other was licence. Within these limits, Vallabha's mind displays an extraordinary power, and it is no exaggeration to say that his was one of the greatest intellects that India has known. There was none after Madhva to match him in intellectual capacity, and there has been none since his time. He is so far the last of the Acharyas, and he could be this only on the strength of his extraordinary powers of mind and thought.

One is amazed all the more at these powers of Vallabha, for he had very little of systematic study in his boyhood or youth, much of this period of his life being spent in constant wandering to and fro about the land. It is indeed a marvel that, while leading such a life, he should have acquired his vast learning concerning the innumerable schools of thought in India and a complete mastery of the Hindu Scriptures, each of which is enough to occupy a man of high intellectual capacity for a life-time. We marvel still more when we remember that he not only did this, but created a new system of life and thought. He did all this, besides, without having any Teacher or *Guru* among living men, and without affiliating himself to any existing school of thought. In this lies his originality and independence of mind, which makes him almost unique among the *Acharyas*. Indeed, he was a first-rate genius, an intellectual and religious genius of a

high order, and as such stands solitary among the teachers of religion in India for the past seven or eight centuries. There have been many men during this period who may be considered even greater than Vallabha in some things, e. g., Ramananda, Kabir, Chaitanya, Nanak etc., but they were Saints and did not have the intellectual powers of Vallabha or his all-roundness.

The normality of Vallabha's life and character appears at its best in the fact that while being so profoundly intellectual, his whole life was dominated by Bhakti. This devotion was not a matter of mere emotion with him. It was that indeed, but it was something far greater. It was deeply ethical and spiritual, and as such covered the entire life of man. It meant both loving God with all one's heart and soul and doing His will in all things. It meant with Vallabha, besides, an affirmation of the world, a matter in which he went not only beyond Shankara, but even Ramanuja and Madhva, the great Theistic Acharyas. This was the reason why he followed in his own life the *Vaidic* and the *Aupanishadic* ideal of *Grihastashrama*, the life of the householder. He did this because he considered it to be the most important part of human life. He could do this because he had found in Bhakti or *Pusti* as he called it an element of transcendent value, something that transvalued all values and transmuted the entire world and made it an integral part of Divine Life. Vallabha's character presents thus a remarkable combination of all the elements of human life, physical, intellectual, emotional, ethical and spiritual, fused together on a very high plane into a harmonious whole. In this he is unique among the religious teachers of India, and one has to go perhaps far back in the past, to the *Vaidic* and the *Aupanishadic* period, to find so normal and all-round a character as his. Since his time the only man in India in whom a similar harmony of the various elements has manifested itself is Brahmarshi Keshub Chunder Sen, the great religious reformer of modern times.



What may be called another aspect of this normality of Vallabha is the healthiness of his soul. He was altogether free from moral or mental sickness or morbidity of any kind. Nothing ran to excess in him with the result that his entire system came to be well-balanced. His personality was fully integrated and that too on a very high level. This spiritual healthiness of his appears at its best in his lack of self-consciousness. For one who founded a new Church and who was indeed a great philosopher and theologian, he was hardly self-conscious at all. He knew full well the kind of work given to him by God Himself to do : he knew its significance, and yet he rarely allows his self to obtrude upon it and thus to dim its glory in any way. He does speak of himself, in his own name and with authority, but this is indeed rare. When he does, it is in the manner of the Hebrew Prophets, who are conscious of having received a direct revelation from God, and in this Vallabha differs from the majority of Hindu religious teachers. At the same time he differs from the Hebrew Prophets in not using God's name and authority so often as the latter do making these things but too familiar to us. Short of this, most of his writings are almost entirely free from any self-consciousness on his part. He is remarkably objective and never allows his emotions or imagination to come between himself and the truth that he sees and the Message that he has to deliver.

Vallabha's normality, all-roundness and healthiness of soul appear on a higher level as beauty of character. His is an extremely well-proportioned life, and his personality, in consequence, is truly beautiful. The God he worships and serves is *Sundaram*, Beauty and Perfect Beauty, and because of his devotion to such a God, his own life is transformed accordingly. There is a Greek quality about his genius, and the highly aesthetic character of the worship of God in his Church has its roots in the life of the founder himself.

In strict accordance with his conception of God as Beauty, Vallabha was a great lover of Nature, especially in its beautiful

forms. The accounts of his three rounds of pilgrimage are full of his halts in the midst of beautiful surroundings, in groves, on the banks of rivers, on hill-side etc. He is fully conscious of the beauty that resides in such places, and he chooses them as places of halt and residence, short as these may be, on that very account. This is testified to by the existence of a number of *Bethakas* raised by his followers in these places since his time.

The beauty of Vallabha's character manifests itself in a striking manner in his relations with men. For years together, for over three decades, he had to deal with men with whom he did not agree in many things. Wherever he went, he met such people, some of them being leaders of the religious and social world of their time. Quite a number of them were proud, haughty and even insolent, and they challenged Vallabha in many ways. Yet the remarkable thing about all his contacts with men of this type is that he deals with them all in a manner which disarms them at once. This is in virtue of his sweet reasonableness, a quality which pervades all his talks with such people that have been reported to us. He, rarely if ever, uses strong language in his controversies with men or in his writings, much less invectives and in spite of the fact that these things were considered perfectly legitimate in the field of religious controversy. He is never bitter towards the followers of Shankara or the Jains, both of whom, according to him, are on the wrong path. He is fully conscious of the fact that what he is teaching is the absolute Truth, and yet he argues with these people in a remarkably sweet and humble manner. He allows Truth itself and his clear and lucid exposition thereof to do their work, altogether unhampered by any extraneous elements.

Another notable characteristic of Vallabha is his humility. While fully conscious of his position as a Teacher, he never allows the devotee in himself to be dominated by it. He is thus truly humble before God and man. It is indeed doubtful if he

thought of himself as an Acharya at all. He never finished his *Bhashya*, commentary, on the *Brahma-Sutras*, which alone could have given him that title. Had he aimed at that recognition, he would never have left it unfinished after writing nearly two-thirds of it. He does not seem to have expressed a desire before his passing away that the few Mss. that he was leaving behind should be well taken care of. These would have been irrevocably lost but for the providential rise of a worthy successor in his son Vitthalnatha, who not only saved them from extinction but finished the commentary himself. Vallabha had left this work unfinished probably in order to take up a more congenial task, which was that of writing his commentary on the *Bhagavata*, called *Sri Subodhinijee*. Even this he did not complete. This clearly shows that he did not care for literary name or fame, which redounds to his credit immeasurably since that is, as Milton has said, the last failing of the men of his type. Not only was he without ambition of any kind, but he was positively and deeply humble. His humility comes out at its best in his confession in one of the last things that he wrote viz., that he failed to obey God's command which came to him twice to leave the world. This is a most remarkable confession for a man, who came to be considered later on as an Acharya, to make, and it well shows how remarkably conscious he was of his failing in God's eyes and how keenly desirous he was that the world should know of it. To us the humility of Vallabha, as it manifests itself in this confession, is one of the crowning-points in his character. He seems to have thought of himself as a servant of God rather than as a devotee even, and that too as one who has failed to obey his Master.

The most interesting and remarkable thing in Vallabha's life and character is the fact that with all his intellectual eminence, vast learning, literary powers and position as a teacher and founder of a new school of life and thought, he sets before himself the ideal of the *Gopis*, the simple unsophisticated milk-maids of Gokula, for realization in his own life as well as that of his

followers. That while being so great a scholiast as to challenge the system of Shankara and to make an effort to supplant it by his own, which was not without some measure of success, he should have placed before himself the goal of becoming like one of these *Gopis* shows where the secret of his life lay. This is the greatest marvel of Vallabha's life and it is one of loving faith and devotion. He aims at being, besides, only one of the many *Gopis*, without thinking of having any special privileges for himself. In his eyes they all stand together on the same level, as we see from the fact that he rarely mentions Radha, the privileged one among the *Gopis*. He desires to serve the Lord as these did without a thought of the self, and he would consider himself blessed beyond measure if he approached even distantly their type of devotion and consecrated service. In his search after this, a search which brings with it its fulfilment from the start, he does not hesitate to turn his back upon all the ideals that were cherished for more than two thousand years by his people and race and which had become an integral part of their religion, viz., Vairagya, Sannyasa, Dhyana, Yoga etc. In this he had the courage to differ from not only the *Karma-Kandis* and the *Jnana-Kandis*, the believers in ritual deeds and in knowledge, but even from the Vaishnava Acharyas such as Ramanuja and Madhva. In virtue of a special revelation that he had from God, he gave an entirely new orientation to much of the Vedic religion that had preceded him and told the world in ringing tones that the heart of the woman as a mother and a wife was nearer the Kingdom of God than that of man with all his boasted knowledge and heroic asceticism. This was not a new teaching. It had already been given wide currency by the *Vishnu Purana* and the *Bhagavata*. Vallabha's greatness, however, lay in the fact that he not only revived it, but made it perhaps more central in religious life than it had ever been before.

In this connection it is worth noting that Vallabha's glorification of woman in general and the *Gopis* in particular, is



altogether free from eroticism of any kind. There is not the least tinge of sexual feeling or sentiment in his devotion to God. In this he presents a striking contrast to such saints as Narsimha Mehta, Mirabai and Sri Chaitanya. It is true the sex-feeling in these was sublimated to the highest extent, but it was there nevertheless. We find the same feeling in a slightly grosser form in the great poet of Gujarata, Dayarama, who was a follower of Vallabha's Church. Among the modern saints we find the same in Paramhansa Ramakrishna appearing now and then. In the latter it took at times a very interesting form and was applied to living beings. To show its manifestation in him, we shall quote the following incidents in his life as narrated originally by the late well-known religious author Ashwini Kumar Datta of Barisal and re-narrated by Motilal Das:

" One day Ashwini Kumar Babu went to Dakshineshwara to see Rama Krishna Paramhansa who sat there in his room wearing a fine black-bordered *dhoti* ( waist-cloth ), and seemed to be very restless and anxious for somebody. Once going out and then coming into room again as if he was awaiting the arrival of somebody. Just at the moment Brahmananda Keshava Chandra Sen with a few friends reached there with a smile on his face. As soon as Paramhamsadeva saw Keshava, an unearthly smile also stole over his majestic face. He was as happy as a loving mother when she meets her only son after a long separation. He at once caught hold of his friend's hands and lovingly said : " You are late, I thought you would not come to-day, so I was very anxious ". Ashwini Kumar marvelled at the blessed union of these two kindred souls and was able to make out the cause of Paramhansa's anxiety above referred to. However, after a while Paramhamsadeva asked Keshava if he would have something. Keshava readily replied : " Of course ". Ashwini Kumar quite followed them. They asked for wine ( heavenly ). Immediately began the *Kirtana* ( singing of hymns ) with the sound of *Mridanga* and *Kartala*, rending the sky. The enthusiastic Bhaktas, being intoxicated with



the wine of *Harinama* commenced dancing with hands joined and keeping time to MRIDANGA and KARTALA."

In this incident Ashwini Kumar compares the love of Ramakrishna for Keshava with that of a mother for her son. The following is more apposite for our purpose here :

" On another occasion during the *Maghotsava* festival Sri Keshava Chandra with his party went to Dakshineshwara in a steamer chanting the name of *Hari* all the way. It was a heavenly sight for those who were present there that day.

" There was the steamer decorated with flowers, festoons and flags of many colours; open, clear, azure sky overhead; free, delicious air blowing on all sides; broad bosom of the great Ganges dancing under the twilight of the evening sky. Nature seemed to have opened her bounties of marvellous beauty. The *Bhaktas* with brown *Chaddars* ( scarfs ) on their shoulders, with flower-garlands on their necks, with hearts filled with enthusiasm and love, with faces of ineffable beauty and with the mystic dance having Sri Keshava Chandra at their centre, presented a sight both cheering and inspiring. At that time Paramhamsadeva was sitting in his room at Dakshineshwara Mandir with a few select *Bhaktas* conversing with them on deep religious subjects and Mahatma Ashwini Kumar was also there amongst them. Suddenly Paramhamsadeva stopped and exclaimed with uncontrollable emotion : " Here comes Keshava with his party ", pointing out his finger towards the steamer. He again exclaimed with greater excitement " Can't you follow ? " " Who can sing such *Kirtanas* but Keshava's party ? " He at once ran out of the room and proceeded towards the river bank. By this time the steamer with Keshava and his party reached the Dakshineshwara Ghat and the *Kirtana* rose to its climax. It was impossible to control Paramhamsadeva. He was impatient to get into the steamer. One of his beloved disciples was going to obstruct him saying, " Where are

you going, Thakur ? ” But he smilingly replied : “ Go back, Radha is going to meet her *Shyama* ( Krishna ), who is in the steamer. ” As soon as he entered the steamer, he folded Sri Keshava unto his bosom, and twice said, “ Thou art my *Shyama*, I am thy Radha. ” The whole party was then flooded with hundredfold bliss and *Bhakti*. A true heavenly sight indeed ! ”

Vallabha is different from all these persons mentioned above inasmuch as he never allows the *Gopibhava*, the feminine devotion of the *Gopis* for their Lord, to dominate him to the extent of making him feel like a woman, much less to manifest any erotic feeling. This is due in all likelihood to the fact that to him the *Lila* of Krishna is altogether *Alaukika* ( supernatural ). We do not mean to say here that it was not so to the persons mentioned above. In all probability his intellectual hold of the fact of this *Lila* being divine was greater, owing to which it was that he did not allow his emotions to overrule him to the same extent as the others did. It may be said by some that as compared with some of them he was lacking in emotional depth, which may perhaps be true. The fact is to be noted, however, that Vallabha did not have in him the least tinge of eroticism. This needs to be especially emphasized in view of the charges that have been levelled against his Church. Whatever be the truth underlying these, they can not be brought home to Vallabha.

What we have said here is amply corroborated by the teaching of Vallabha himself and of his most important successors. To them all, the *Rasa-Lila*, the dance sport of Krishna, in which he is said to have consummated the love of the *Gopis* with the physical act, is the divinest part of his *Lila*. Vallabha calls the *Rasapanchadhyayi*, the five chapters in the tenth book of the *Bhagavata* dealing with the dance, as *Fala-prakarana*, the chapter regarding the final reward. To him this reward is no other than the perfect union of the soul with God, which is realized only when one is altogether free from any earthly and gross elements,

and when, besides, God Himself calls the soul of His own accord to realize and have fellowship with Him in that manner. Vallabha's own *Sannyasa* and death which followed soon after he took the vow of renunciation were, in some respects, the object-lessons, of how this *Lila* was to be realized. In his case the call of God for this purpose meant death to everything including the body. In full consonance with this, his followers look upon him as *Viprayogagnivatara*, the Incarnation of the Fire of Separation from God. According to them he was one in whom this fire was burning all his life, and he literally burnt himself to death with the same fire. It created in him deep and constant humility, sense of acute pain and misery owing to this separation from God. Vallabha himself said as much to a follower of Chaitanya when the latter asked him why his disciples were so thin. Vallabha, besides, does not give the impression of being feminine in his character, and it is worthy of note that his Church has not thought of this feminine element as a distinguishing feature of his life and character. His son Vitthalnatha, on the other hand, has been looked upon as realizing this type of devotional character.

Vallabha, though not womanly or Gopi-like in character, was extremely gentle. Only once in his active and pretty strenuous life, he and his followers are said to have been a bit violent in their self-defence. This was, however, in his early days, perhaps in the first or second tour of pilgrimage, and in consequence of an unwarranted attack on him and his party by the fanatical priests of a Shaiva temple in the South. Vallabha was then quite young, and it may be that his disciples were more responsible for this action, in self-defence as it was, than he himself. Except for a few strong terms used against the teachers of the *Mayavada*, there is not even a rough word, much less a term of abuse, that he used in his innumerable controversies with all sorts of people. He had succeeded remarkably in realizing in himself the type of character of a devotee enjoined by the *Bhagavad-Gita* and the *Bhagavata Purana*. He was full of the spirit of forbearance and forgiveness,

which is considered to be an essential element of *Bhakti*. Without ill-will towards any, with positive good-will towards all, and without jealousy and anger of any kind, he lived in the happiest of relations with all people.

Vallabha was, besides, a man of singularly pure character. Not only was he entirely free from grossness or coarseness of any kind, but there was a kind of other-worldliness about him all along his life. While living in the world, a matter in which he had dared to differ from many of the preceding Hindu Teachers, he had no spirit of worldliness about him. In this his life is far more exemplary than that of many Sannyasis even. Very often these in India or the monks in Europe, have exchanged one world for another, and often this new world of theirs, which goes under the name of Church or Order etc., is far worse than the one they have left. These so-called Sannyasis or monks are full of worldly cares, passions and ambitions, in all of which they indulge more freely because they think that the work they are doing is not their own but God's. Vallabha had seen from close observation that such renunciation was not only not of the right kind, but was positively harmful to the soul. This is why he did not practise it himself and definitely asked his disciples not to follow it. He did not want to clothe his religion in any kind of conventional garb lest it might attract curious attention and false respect from the people of the world. He shunned these as poison and therein lies his uniqueness. He would rather be a hypocrite in this sense that he would manifest less of religion than he actually possessed and would like to pass off before people as an almost irreligious man. What Jesus asked his disciples to do in the Sermon on the Mount in regard to this matter has been perhaps more systematically practised by Vallabha and a number of his disciples than any group of people we know. Among the great teachers of modern times, we know only one, viz., Keshub Chunder Sen, who practised and preached this kind of religious life. Vallabha's practice and teaching of this, however, were more thoroughgoing,



and formed an integral, almost an essential part of his religion. Some of the finest stories concerning the life and practice of his followers are those in which this feature of secret religion is brought out. They have a dread of publicity of any kind, and it was probably this which made Vallabha instinctively shrink from organizing and institutionalizing his religion. No man can do such a thing who does not live constantly before the gaze of God.

This brings us to what was central in Vallabha's life. His faith in God was so deep that he felt Him to be an ever-living Reality close at hand, and he made it the sole purpose of his life to please God by serving Him with all the devotion of his heart and soul. This was to him the essence of true *Bhakti*. He says again and again that all conventions and even religious traditions have to be discarded if a soul wants to possess the *Bhakti* of the right type. God to him is not some static impersonal Essence but the most dynamic Personality, the Purushottama, the Supreme Person, who is ever ready to manifest His will and good pleasure and to grant His grace in abundance if the human soul is willing to do His bidding. In strict accordance with this, God gave him definite commands appearing in person and speaking to him as one person does to another. This is something unique in the history of Hindu religion, and one has to go far to find another person who heard the voice of God in the same way. Maharshi Devendranath Tagore heard the voice of God often in regard to the management of his private life and his church and it is interesting to observe that he realized and revived the *Aupanishadic* ideals of spiritual life more than any one else in modern times. His great successor Brahmarsi Keshab Chander Sen heard the voice of God constantly, and it was he who, in obedience to this voice, gave a new orientation to the *Aupanishadic* religion of the Brahma Samaj in the direction of the *Bhakti-Marga*. The influence of his personality and work spread far beyond the confines of his own Samaj, so much so that it did not have a small share in bringing about almost a nation-wide revival of the teachings of Sri Chaitanya. Some of the Vaishnavas



and the neo-Vaishnavas did not hesitate to speak of him as a kind of Chaitanya of modern times. It is such men as hear the voice of God who revolutionize the course of history. It was the consciousness on the part of Vallabha's Church that he habitually spoke the word of God that made it speak of him as the *Mukhavatara*, the Incarnation of the Mouth of God.

Vallabha's outward life was, in strict conformity with his teaching, simple, contented and full of peace. The houses that he built at Adel for himself and for his immediate disciples, were ordinary cottages such as village people have. Not only was the idea of magnificence of any kind eschewed altogether, but that of comfort even does not seem to have played any part in the building of these. The same simplicity seems to have ruled his food, drink and dress. He wore only two pieces of cloth, one as his waist-cloth and the other as a scarf to cover the main part of his body. He travelled in this scanty dress all round India for three times, and he kept it till the last in spite of the great name and fame he had acquired. He did not wear even shoes of any kind, a habit which he seems to have continued all his life. It is expressly mentioned that he performed his pilgrimages bare-footed, which shows that he denied himself even the barest of necessities. In spite of this, it must be said that he does not give the impression of a man of the ascetic type. Neither did he feel like a Sannyasi or a Sadhu, nor did he want to be regarded as one given to ascetic practices of any kind. His simplicity grew from within like a beautiful flower; he being altogether unconscious of the fact that there was any special merit in it.

The hard life that he had lived for nearly a score of years had inured him to heat and cold and roughness of all kinds to such an extent that he took these things as a matter of course. He never uttered a word of complaint in regard to such matters, whether with reference to himself or to his disciples. He was perfectly healthy and strong in physique, was middle-sized in stature;

and rather dark in appearance. There exists a picture of his said to have been made in his own life-time. The tradition in regard to this picture is that it was drawn at the express order of Humayun, the Emperor of Delhi, who sent a painter from his court to Vallabha specially for the purpose. We do not know how far to rely on this tradition, for Humayun had lived in Delhi but for a short time while Vallabha lived, and this period was full of trouble for him. Whatever this be, a picture of Vallabha is said to have been existing at the Mogul Court in the time of Akbar. Once the latter was highly pleased with a courtier of his called Nagaridas for some service and he asked him to demand whatever he liked as a reward for the same. Nagaridas requested the Emperor to give him this picture of Vallabha, and it was given to him accordingly. This man is said to have been the founder of the royal house of Kishangarh, which has the picture in its possession to-day. Vallabha is seen in this picture in the act of teaching three of his disciples, viz., Madhava Bhatta of Kashmere, Krishnadas Meghan and Damodardas. This picture is said to be a faithful representation of Vallabha.

Taken all in all, Vallabha was both a great and a good man. Since his time he has been acclaimed universally by the entire Hindu public as an *Acharya*, which gives him a place among the four or five great religious Teachers of Hinduism of mediæval times. By his own followers he has been looked upon as a kind of Incarnation of Sri Krishna himself. He is, however, never worshipped in the temples of his Church called *Havelis* along with Krishna. He impresses us as being more of a Mystic than an Acharya or a Saint or an Incarnation of God. Although he had all the gifts, especially in the realm of intellectual thought and Scriptural learning, needed for being an Acharya, he came to be known as such more by accident than by any ambitious effort on his own part as we have shown elsewhere. He was, besides, very different in character from the three great Acharyas, viz., Shankara, Ramanuja and Madhva who preceded him. They were far more

aggressive and militant than Vallabha, and much of their time and energy were given to organizing and institutionalizing their religious work. In comparison with them Vallabha may be regarded as something of a Quietist. No doubt the last two decades of his life, the most fruitful part thereof, were spent in preaching and teaching. He even went about for the propagation of his faith, yet most of his time was passed in quiet fellowship with God and a relatively small company of disciples and followers. He lived an ideal home-life with his wife and mother and two children, and this very thing probably limited his activities in other directions. It is even doubtful if he contemplated the rise of a full-fledged Sampradaya established in his name like those of Ramanuja and Madhva. A noted scholar of his Church told us that in all probability Vallabha never contemplated the establishment of the churches known as Havelis, and that he aimed at realizing in his own case as well as that of his followers personal rather than congregational worship and devotion to God. This scholar was emphatic in this view of his, which it seemed to us was due to the rise of the various abuses in connection with such places of worship. Whatever this be, there is no doubt that Vallabha left behind him only one temple, viz., that of Sri Govardhanathjee, and even this was not entirely his own. In spite of this, the seed of what we may well call Bhagavata-Mysticism that he sowed was so potent that it grew into a mighty movement of *Bhakti*. This was in virtue of his devotion being of a deeper kind than that of either Ramanuja or Madhva. We well remember a remark that was made to us by a well-known Roman Catholic scholar of Hindu religion that true *Bhakti* was found in Vallabha alone of all the Acharyas, and he agreed with us when we said that the other great person who created a true movement of *Bhakti* in India was Sri Chaitanya. Vallabha came to be the founder of a great movement because he was a Mystic in the true sense of the term.

## CHAPTER XIV

### Vallabhacharya and his Friends

One of the most beautiful features of the Bhagavata-Dharma is the realization of the idea of friendship. The chief Scripture of this religion in India, the *Bhagawad-Gita*, owes much of its charm and beauty to the tender relationship between Sri Krishna and Arjuna depicted therein. The great message of the book is imparted through the channel of the friendship that existed between these two persons, one of whom stands as an Incarnation of God and the other as a heroic but humble man and disciple. Even more than the message itself, the idea that God Himself should unite Himself in such close friendship with a human being, delighting Himself in it, and that He should teach the highest truths concerning God and salvation through the vehicle of such a relationship, is the core of the gospel contained in that book. That God is the best friend of man and that He is always ready to become such the moment a human being puts himself into the right condition for it—this forms the most vital part of the teaching of the Bhagawad-Gita.

We find the same emphasis on friendship in the religion taught by Jesus Christ, which is another phase of the Bhagavata Dharma. We learn from the Gospel of St John, which is rightly considered to be the most spiritual of all the Christian Gospels, that there came a moment in the life of Jesus when he told his immediate disciples that he would call them his friends rather than anything else. Jesus is represented in this Gospel as the Son of



God, and it is as an Incarnation of God that he speaks these words to His disciples. The fact worth noting is that the Incarnate One delights in calling His disciples friends, and it is as a friend that He teaches them some of the deepest truths of spiritual life.

Consistently with this, both in Hinduism and in Christianity, the idea of friendship with God has played a significant part in the development of religious life in individuals and groups. So far as Hinduism is concerned, this is true especially in regard to Bhakti-movements thereof. *Sakhya*, which means friendship, is considered to be an integral part of Bhakti in its fulness, and a number of Hindu Saints developed friendly relations with God in their onward march towards the Final Beatitude. This has been, however, largely an individual affair with the Hindus, and even in those few cases in which this kind of relationship with God was cultivated, it was not a matter of friendship exclusively. It easily merged into others such as *Dasya* i. e. the relationship of a servant to a master, or *Madhurya* i. e. that between the beloved and the lover, etc. The same is true of Christianity also.

There appeared, however, among the Christians in the thirteenth and the fourteenth centuries a most interesting group of people called the Friends of God, and they developed special relations with God as such. This body of people contained among them some of the most remarkable men Christianity ever produced, viz., Eckhart, Tauler, Suso, Ruyesbrook etc. These were Mystics *par excellence*, and Christian Mysticism is found at its best in their spiritual experiences and writings. They created a religious movement which touched the deepest springs of individual and community-life, and much of what was best in the Reformation brought about by Luther owed its origin to them. The remarkable thing about them was that their Mysticism, while being profoundly spiritual, was at the same time filled with much enthusiasm for social and philanthropic work. The beauty of the



movement, besides, lay in the fact that it was as much the product of laymen as of the so called 'religious' people. This was a new feature in the life of the Christian Church as it had been known for centuries. It gave, besides, a new orientation to Christian theology and philosophy, and in Eckhart, one of its foremost leaders, we have one who is considered to be the founder of Modern Philosophy. It was an all-round religious movement which, however, did not become a Church or *Sampradaya* by itself. Perhaps the chief reason for its not developing into a new Church lay in the fact that the Catholic Church then was too powerful to allow a schism to take place in itself. The protagonists of the movement were, besides, in spite of their originality and independence in thought and action in many ways, too loyal to the Catholic Church to think of creating another Church. They defied the authority of the Church in many ways, especially in those matters in which they thought it to be wrong, drawing upon themselves thus the worst anathemas that the Church could hurl upon them. They established a precedent which Luther followed to its logical conclusion. Their principal aim, however, was spiritual, and they worked solely for the regeneration of men in such a manner as to make them Friends of God.

Friendship with God forms, thus, an integral part of the Bhagavata-Dharma, whether in the East or in the West, in Hinduism or Christianity. Such friendship with God is naturally the origin of friendship between God's men among themselves, and one of the most beautiful chapters in the history of religion all over the world is the record of such friendship and fellowship. It is the "Communion of Saints" proper, and the essence of religious life lies in communion with God and with His Saints.

A beautiful feature of Vallabha's life lies in the fact that he stood in the relationship of friendship with several men, which is all the more interesting inasmuch as he is the only one among the great Acharyas and Teachers in India, who is said to

have *Sakhas* or friends. The number of such friends of his is said to have been eight, four of whom were poets. That Vallabha should have thought and spoken of men who stood as disciples to him as his friends, testifies to his deep love and tenderness for these and also to his humility. The only other great Teacher who is known to have such *Sakhas* or friends is Swami Narayana. He appeared three centuries after Vallabha and it is not unlikely that he may have been influenced in this matter to some extent by the example of the great Acharya.

We shall give here a bare sketch of the life of the four Poet-Sakhas, showing thereby their relationship with Vallabha. The most important of these is Surdasa, a great composer and singer of songs of devotion. He is said to have composed some thousands of lyrics, most of which are remarkable for their deep devotional feeling. This work of his has given him a place of his own among the large number of religious poets in the Church of Vallabha.

Surdasa, being blind, so devoted himself to religious life and music that ever since his time innumerable blind men have followed in his footsteps and gloried in being called by his name. Any blind man who gives himself to religion and singing the name of God is called Surdasa, which shows how this poet-devotee consecrated his blindness and set a remarkable example for hundreds and possibly thousands of unfortunate men to follow. Surdasa had already taken to religious life before he came to know Vallabha and being a man of holy character and high talents had a small following of his own. He lived in a place called Gaughata situated between Agra and Mathura. Once upon a time Vallabha came to this place and made his halt there for a day. Surdasa, coming to know of this, went to see him. Vallabha, being told by some people who he was, requested him to sing some of his songs. The latter then sang a few songs, one of which stands as follows in a free and rough translation:

My God, I am the chief of sinners;  
 There is none to match me in this.  
 Who else is there deserving of such a high place?  
 If you can give me a guarantee  
 That you can save me as You saved Ajamil,  
 My trust in you will increase,  
 And I shall call other sinners like myself  
 To be sanctified by you.  
 Gathering together from many places  
 People pine for such salvation,  
 And I can bring these to You now.  
 Later on I shall call others.  
 Imitating one another,  
 People go on sinning.  
 O Lord, I fall at your feet,  
 With all the wretched sinners,  
 And this is my offering to You.  
 My Lord and Master;  
 How many prayers shall I offer of this kind?  
 For even while offering them,  
 I am surrounded by sinful thoughts.  
 Save me this time, O God,  
 For I am the chief of sinners.

The songs that were sung by Surdasa were all full of the note of deep penitence that is expressed in this one. Upon this Vallabha asked him to sing something expressing God's glory and grace, something that struck a positive note of realization of and fellowship with God. Surdasa replied that he lacked in such experience and requested Vallabha to initiate him into his faith. This was duly done and in course of time Sardasa so entered into the positive spiritual life and *Bhakti* of the new Church that his heart blossomed forth with the grace of God. He composed some hundreds of songs narrating God's gracious dealings with His devotees as they are described in the tenth book of the Bhagavata Purana. He experienced

all this *Lila*, gracious sport of God, in the worship of the faith he had now adopted, and gave such beautiful expression to it as but few in Vallabha's Church have done. As a composer of songs of this type he has a place unique in the Vallabha Sampradaya, and because of the large number of these lyrics he is called Sura-Sagara. They all are in Vraja Bhasha, a dialect of Hindi spoken especially in the Vraja district, like much of the vernacular literature belonging to this Church. Though their sole theme is the *Lila* of Sri Krishna as narrated in the tenth book of the *Bhagavata*, there is, nevertheless, much originality and spontaneity about them. They have the mark upon them of being the utterances of one who has had a first-hand experience of the things related therein. The poet-devotee is so moved by what he hears from the *Bhagavata* that he visualises the entire scene with his mental eye, and his powerful imagination, stirred deeply by his passionate devotion, creates a new picture which is as fresh as the original one itself. To him the wonder of wonders is that He who is the Creator of the Universe, and its Preserver too, the Great God of Infinite Power, manifested Himself as a helpless Babe, Infant and Child and Boy, and as such entered into tender and gracious relations with the humble and poor people of the Vraja-land. This *Lila* is no more a matter of the past with him, because the same God out of His infinite grace for His devotees enacts the same drama again before him in the present. This makes it transcend both time and space, something supersensuous and supernatural, and of the very essence of God's life. It is of such *Lila* that Surdasa has sung in innumerable songs.

In the Church of Vallabha there have been quite a large number of poets and composers of songs similar to those of Surdasa. He, however, stands by himself apart from them all. He is often called by his co-religionists Sura, which means the sun, and they contrast him with Tulsidasa, the author of the Hindi Ramayana, who is called by them the moon. Making due allowance for their partiality, there is no doubt that perhaps no poet has done so much towards the re-creation of the *Bhagavata*



in the Vraja-bhasha as Surdasa, in a manner similar to what has been done by Tulsidasa in regard to the original Ramayana.

Another *Sakha*, Friend of Vallabha, was Parmanandadasa. He was a Brahmin of Kanouja and being a poet and a highly religious-minded man, was given to composing songs of devotion. Before he came to know Vallabha, he too had a small following of his own. Once upon a time he came to Prayaga, where he attracted much attention by his devotional singing. Vallabha was then staying in Adel which was not far from the place. One of his followers, Kshatriya Kapur, hearing of the fame of Parmanandadasa, went to his place to listen to his songs. The singing went on for almost the whole of the night. Kapur then left the place to go back to Adel. The songs that he had heard were full of a deep longing on the part of Parmanandadasa to find God in his Incarnation as Sri Krishna, but they were lacking in any positive experience of God. After the singing was over, Parmanandadasa slept for some time, and he had a dream in which he saw one of the Images of Sri Krishna lying in the lap of Kapur as the latter was seated while hearing his own songs. The Image told him that He had heard his songs that night while sitting in this way. Upon this Parmanandadasa felt a keen desire to see Kapur, thinking that he was a favoured one of God and as such would be of much help to him in his own search after God. With this purpose he set out for Adel in the morning, and on his crossing the river Yamuna, he found Vallabha saying his prayers on one of the banks of the river after his morning bath. He was deeply impressed by what he saw of Vallabha and in course of time came to be his disciple. He then began to compose songs concerning the *Lila* of God in the same way as Surdasa. The number of these songs of his runs into hundreds, for which he too is sometimes called Parmananda-Sagar. His songs, though lacking in both the depth and the poetic beauty of those of Surdasa, are much simpler, which gives them a charm of their own.



Kumbhanadasa was another Friend of Vallabha. He lived in a place called Yamunavanto and had some land near Parsoli which he cultivated, maintaining himself thereby. He became a disciple of Vallabha soon after the installation of the Image of Sri Govardhannathjee. Since this event took place in the very beginning of the new Church, or rather was its starting-point, Kumbhanadasa may be said to be associated with it from its origin. Being a man of much simplicity of heart, he entered into personal relations with the Image, and Govardhannathjee, it is said, used to talk and play with him as a friend. Once upon a time the priests of the temple were threatened with serious molestation at the hands of the Moslems who came with an army. and the Image, being asked what should be done under the circumstances, said that they should take it to a forest close by. Kumbhandasa and some of his fellow-believers carried the Image on a male-buffalo there and placed it under a tree. This tract of land was full of brushwood and there were thorns about, due to which the entire party suffered much. At the usual time they offered the Image its food, and Kumbhanadasa, being asked by it to sing something, composed a song in which he taunted the Deity for being fond of a place full of thorns and for showing cowardice in the face of an insignificant enemy. Soon after they heard the news that the Moslems had left that part of the country, and they went back to their place with the Image.

Kumbhanadasa was constantly in the company of Sri Govardhannathjee, his special mission being to attend the Deity and to compose songs in His praise. The number of such songs is pretty large, and since they have a poetic beauty of their own, his fame soon spread all round. It is said that even Akbar, the Emperor of Delhi, hearing of him, sent for him. Kumbhanadasa went accordingly to Sikri, though much against his will, since he did not want to be separated even for a day from the Image. He was, besides, not very anxious to see the Emperor. On his coming to Akbar, however, the latter asked him to sing some-

thing, whereupon he sang a song, which roughly translated stands thus :

What business have the devotees of God with Sikri ?  
 My shoes are torn while coming and going.  
 I have had, moreover, to bow down to him,  
 Whose face even it is painful for me to see.  
 O Kumbhanadasa, without thy Master Giridhara,  
 Every place is unreal and evil.

On hearing this, Akbar is said to have been much pleased for he appreciated the deep faith and independence of Kumbhanadasa, who would not flatter him in the least. He then let him go. While returning from Sikri, Kumbhanadasa composed some songs in which he expressed his pain due to his separation from the Deity and the joy he would have on seeing Him again. On his coming to the Image he composed other songs. All these songs are still extant.

There is another story said of Kumbhanadasa which might well be recorded here. Once Raja Mansinga, one of the generals of Akbar, came to Vraja-land for the purpose of pilgrimage. He came to the temple of Sri Govardhannathjee, and hearing Kumbhanadasa sing he desired to see him. Next morning on going round Mt. Giriraj, he came to Parsoli on the way. Kumbhanadasa was sitting at his place in this village after his bath, and seeing Raja Mansinga pass by, bowed to him and sat down again. He was then engaged in his worship and so paid no further attention to the Raja, who had come to his house and was waiting for him to finish his prayers. Having done this, he welcomed the Raja in a proper manner. While the latter was sitting in his house, he asked his niece to bring his mirror so that he might make the *Tilaka*\* on his forehead. To this she replied that the mirror had

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\* It is a sign made on the forehead to show what form of faith one believes in. All important sects in India have each their own particular kind of sign. Some make it with ash, others with *Kumkuma*, a kind of red powder, and the followers of Vallabha use a kind of clay called *Gopichandana*.

leaked off. The Raja, not understanding this, asked what it meant. In the meantime the girl brought some water in a cup made of leaves and placed it before Kumbhanadasa to be used as a mirror. Seeing this the Raja brought out his mirror of gold and offered it to Kumbhanadasa as a gift. To this the poet replied : "What shall I do with such a precious thing ? As I have only a hut made of clay and hay to live in, it is not safe to keep such a thing here." The Raja then offered him a purse full of gold coins. At this Kumbhanadasa said : "I have a farm which I cultivate for the purpose of maintaining myself. Because of this I do not want any money from you." The Raja then offered him a village as a gift, but Kumbhanadasa would not accept it, saying that he was not a Brahmin, and that he wanted to maintain himself by the labour of his own hands. The Raja requested him again to accept something from him at any rate, whereupon the latter said : "Will you do what I ask you to do ?" The Raja said : "yes." Then Kumbhanadasa said : "Be kind enough not to come to me again." The Raja was amazed at this, for he had never seen in his life such detachment from the world and disregard of wealth. He then left Kumbhanadasa after bowing down to him with much veneration.\*

Kumbhanadasa was exceedingly poor, and had, besides, a big family of seven sons. Knowing his penurious condition, Gosainjee, the son and successor of Vallabha, desired once to take him with himself on one of his tours so that he might get some money by way of gifts from the Vaishnavas. Accordingly Gosainjee proposed this to him, and though Kumbhanadasa was not willing to be separated from Sri Govardhannathjee, he did not like to refuse the proposal of one whom he looked upon as a kind of Master.

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\* The stories regarding the meeting of Kumbhanadasa with both Akbar and Mansinga are hard to believe in. He must be at least a hundred years old to have seen these two persons, and nowhere it is said that he lived to be so old. We have put them here, however, to show the atmosphere of the new movement.

The party started on a fixed day and when they made their halt in the evening, Kumbhanadasa felt the pangs of separation from Govardhannathjee so exceedingly that he began to give vent to his pain in sighs and tears. Gosainjee then felt that he had made a mistake in taking him away from the Image. He also realized that Govardhannathjee Himself must be feeling the same kind of pain due to separation from His companion and friend, perhaps even more bitterly than Kumbhanadasa himself. He then asked him to go back. The songs that Kumbhanadasa composed during this short period of separation and on his meeting Govardhannathjee again are full of much pathos and beauty. The most startling thing in this story as it is given in the literature of this Church is that the pangs of separation were felt not only by Kumbhanadasa but by Sri Govardhannath as well, and that they were much greater in the case of the latter than in that of the former. The belief of this Church is that the love of the Lord for His devotees is hundred times as much as that of the latter for Him.

Kumbhanadasa was a man of God and a true poet, and as such he had an originality of his own which comes out well in the following story reported of him. Once Gosainjee asked him how many sons he had, and he replied that he had one and a half. This being a riddle, since he had no less than seven sons, he was asked what he meant by it. He replied : " Sir, my one son is Chaturbhujadasa, for he follows the faith of our *Sampradaya* in giving full service to God in both ways, viz., by actual service of God with his body, mind and soul, and also by singing songs of His praise and grace. The other, who is only half of a son, is Krishnadasa, for he devotes himself only to the personal service of God. "

This Krishnadasa was put in charge of the cows of Sri Govardhannath. To look after them was his service of God. Once upon a time when he was out with them for grazing them,



a wolf came and attacked one of the cows. Krishnadasa tried to save the cow, but he himself was attacked by the wolf and in the struggle he lost his life. When this news was brought to Kumbhanadasa, he fainted away and remained unconscious for a long time. Gosainjee, coming to know of this, came to the place where Kumbhanadasa was lying. Many people had assembled there and were talking among themselves saying that it was the great love for his son that had brought him to this state. Since this was a reflection on his faith in God, Gosainjee, who knew the true cause of the fainting, said to him : " Kumbhanadasa, why are you lying like this ? Come early to-morrow to the temple and you will be allowed to have the *darshana* of Govardhannathjee." Hearing this Kumbhanadasa at once sat up. The people then did the needful concerning the cremation of the body of his son. Next day Kumbhanadasa went early to the temple where he was allowed to have the *darshana* of the Image. Gosainjee showed him this favour although he was considered unclean,\* since he well knew the pangs of separation that Kumbhanadasa would feel if he did not see the Image. He was the first person in the new Church to be granted this privilege, and ever since such ceremonious uncleanness is not allowed to stand in the way of people's coming to the temples of this Church for the purpose of offering their worship to the Images. Kumbhanadasa was allowed to have the *darshana* only once a day in the early morning. Because of this he felt the pain of separation for the rest of the day. This lasted for several days, during the course of which period he composed a number of songs expressing the agony of his heart.

Kumbhanadasa was indeed a remarkable man. Born in the Kunbi caste, a community devoted to agriculture, and of a very poor family, he developed by the grace of God into a true devotee and a poet of real merit. He came to be associated with this new

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\* The Hindus consider the people intimately related to a dead person unclean for a certain number of days. During this period they are not allowed to enter temples etc.



Church from its start and consecrated himself to the service of Sri Govardhannathjee all his life. He rendered thus a unique piece of service to this body, the like of which it has not fallen to the lot of many to do.

Krishnadasa was another *Sakha*, Friend of Vallabha. He too came from the farmer community, with this difference, however, that his family belonged to the landlord class among them. Unlike the three *Sakhas* mentioned above, he came from Gujarata. His mind was turned towards religion from his early boyhood, which made him seek the company of *Sadhus* etc. His conscience had become so keen owing to the influence of such people that he, at the age of thirteen, procured justice for a merchant who was robbed by his father and his accomplices of a big sum of money. The story is related thus :

Krishnadasa's father was the headman of a village. Once there came to the place a man with a lot of merchandise, which he sold for 14000 Rs. and left the village with the money. Krishnadasa's father sent some men after him to rob him of the sum, which they succeeded in doing. Of this loot a major portion was taken by the headman himself. On coming to know of this, and being exceedingly grieved at the affair, Krishnadasa requested his father to restore the money to the merchant. The latter was highly incensed at this and beat the boy severely for what he looked upon as grave impertinence on his part. The next day the merchant came back to the village and complained to the headman about the robbery, whereupon the latter found fault with him and rebuked him sharply for what he called his negligence. The merchant was in much trouble at this and did not know what to do. Krishnadasa then told him what had happened, and asked him to go to Ahmedabad, the capital of the province, and lodge a complaint with the authorities there. He added that he himself would be the witness of the man against his father. The merchant accordingly went to Ahmedabad and complained against the

headman. The authorities sent for the latter and his son, and upon Krishnadasa telling them what had happened, his father was forced to return the entire sum to the merchant. He was, however, not punished because of the intercession of his son. Krishnadasa succeeded, thus, in getting justice done to the merchant and in saving his father from punishment for his crime. The Nawab of Ahmedabad, coming to know of this remarkable boy, wanted to engage him in his service, but the latter refused this offer since his heart was set upon other things. Now that it was impossible for him to return home, his father being extremely angry with him for what had happened, Krishnadasa took to a wandering life. He moved about in different parts of India for some years, seeking everywhere the company of religious people. In the course of his travels, he came to Mathura, where he became a disciple of Vallabha.

Krishnadas, being a man of much intelligence and executive ability, began soon to take an active part in the organisation of the new movement. Vallabha had then only one shrine in his possession, that of Govardhannathjee, and in all probability even this was shared in common by Vallabha and some of the followers of Sri Chaitanya. It has been already said that a beautiful and costly *Mandir* was built by Puraumalla, a disciple of Vallabha, for the Image. The ritual in connection with the worship in this temple was in the hands of some Brahmins of Bengal, while Krishnadasa was entrusted with the work of collecting money for the shrine. His position was corresponding to what we now call a secretary, and he is known in his church as an *Adhikari*, which means a manager. While doing this work he found that the Bengali priests embezzled most of the money and the gifts, which were brought mainly by his efforts. The situation became intolerable in course of time and he complained to Vitthalnatha, the son of Vallabha, who had assumed the leadership of the movement after the death of his father. The latter was not willing at first to disturb an arrangement that Vallabha had made, but he was

prevailed upon to take the matter seriously in hand. Krishnadasa requested him to write two letters, one to Raja Birbala, and another to Raja Mansinga, two of the most important ministers of Akbar, acquainting them with the situation and requesting them for necessary help in the matter of redressing the grievance.

Krishnadasa took these letters to the two ministers, and securing their sympathy and moral support, came back to Giriraja, where the temple was. He arranged with some Brahmins of his own choosing to take up the work of the ritual-worship in their hands as soon as they were called upon to do so. He, then, finding a proper opportunity, set fire to the huts of the Bengali Brahmins, which made them leave the temple in a body to save their houses and property. In their absence Krishnadasa put his own priests in the temple along with some guards round the place. The Bengali priests on their return found to their dismay that they had been ousted from the shrine. They used force but they were beaten back by the guards. They then went to Mathura where Rupa and Sanatana, the two great disciples of Sri Chaitanya lived, and complained to them about the matter. Both these men sent for Krishnadasa and rebuked him much, saying that he had committed a grievous sin, inasmuch as he, being a Sudra, got the Brahmins beaten. The latter retorted by saying that it did not behove them to speak in that manner, since they themselves, though non-Brahmins, made the Brahmins fall at their feet, which was, if anything, a worse sin. The matter did not end here, however. The Bengalis lodged a complaint against Krishnadasa before the civil authorities in Mathura. Krishnadasa, on being asked as to why he had dismissed the Brahmins, replied that he removed them because they had left the worship of the Image, a thing which they should not have done. He was asked to engage them again, to which he replied by saying that it could not be done without the permission of Vitthalnatha. The matter was then referred to the latter and the Bengali priests supplicated him to give them back their work since they were now without any

means of livelihood. Vitthalnatha, then, gave them the Image of Madan Mohanjee for worship. The matter came thus to an amicable end, and Sri Govardhannathjee began to be served by Gujarati priests from that time.

Krishnadasa, besides being an able manager, was a man of much strength of character. After Vallabha's passing away, he thought of himself as a trustee of the shrine of Govardhannathjee, and as such did not hesitate to fight even against Vitthalnatha. The facts are these. Vallabha left two sons behind him, viz., Gopinatha and Vitthalnatha. Unfortunately, the first of these, who was the older of the two, passed away soon after his father, leaving a male child behind him. As the new Church was just rising, it was thought by many people including Vitthalnatha himself, that it should have strong leadership. Accordingly the latter became the head of the movement. Krishnadasa, thinking otherwise, forbade him to enter the precincts of the shrine. This caused much pain and anguish of heart to Vitthalnatha, who gave expression to it in a number of remarkable prayers. It was probably the death of the little son of Gopinatha which brought about a reconciliation between Krishnadasa and Vitthalnatha. In the literature of the Vallabha Sampradaya, it is said that it was by the order of Raja Birbala that the possession of the shrine was given over to Vitthalnatha, and that Krishnadasa was sent to prison, from where he was released at the intercession of Vitthalnatha. This, however, does not seem to be true, chiefly because according to other accounts found in the Sampradayic literature, Birbala came to be known to Akbar long after this event could have taken place.

Later in his life Krishnadasa did one or two things which strained his relations with Vitthalnatha and cast something of a slur on his good name. The matter was so serious that he was believed to have become a ghost when he died by an accident.



He is said to have been released from this evil state by the - grace of Vitthalnathajee.

Whatever this be, there is no doubt that Krishnadasa served the new Sampradaya with much fidelity for almost the whole of his life, thus helping much in the building up of it in its early days. He is known as the *Adhikari*, the Manager, and it was, indeed, his able and efficient management of the sole shrine of the movement that had much to do in giving it a good start.

Krishnadasa was also a poet of some merit. His poetry consists mainly of songs which he composed in honour of the Deity he worshipped. His poems do not show much originality, being more or less imitations of those of Surdasas.

The four men mentioned in this chapter were men of gifts, which they devoted entirely to the cause of Vallabha's Church. It was this which brought them close to Vallabha. They worked with him all his life, helping him in the building up of the Church in many ways. Their greatest service, however, lay in the fact that they presented to the Church new ideals and types of character as *Sakhas* of Vallabha.



## CHAPTER XV

### **Vallabhacharya and Sri Chaitanya**

An outstanding fact in connection with the life of Vallabha is that of his being a contemporary of Sri Chaitanya, the great Vaishnava teacher of Bengal. No movements of Bhakti in India have been so deep and intense as those connected with these two men, and the most remarkable thing about them is that they rose and grew simultaneously and altogether independently of each other. It is true there were several meetings between both these teachers but these took place after they had started their work as leaders of new movements, and they did not exercise any influence on each other.

Tradition, however, has tried to connect both Vallabha and Chaitanya in some closer relation. It has been said that the latter married a daughter of the former called Laxmidevi. This story has no foundation whatsoever in fact. In the first place, both these men were more or less of the same age, Vallabha being about seven years older than Chaitanya.\* Vallabha, moreover, married when he was in his twenties, and Chaitanya renounced the world and his family at the age of twenty-four. Vallabha, besides, according to the traditions of his Church, had no daughter. The mistake, then, seems to have arisen from the fact that the

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\* This difference holds true in the case of Vallabha's birth having taken place in Samvat 1535. If the year 1529 be the right one, then he would be older than Chaitanya by about thirteen years. But even then there is no truth in their alleged relationship.

name of the father-in-law of Chaitanya was Vallabha Bhatta, the very name by which Vallabhacharya was known at that time. In addition to this the similarity of life and thought between the two teachers was large enough to give rise to such a confusion. The testimony of history, however, is clear in the matter. Regarding this, M. T. Kennedy in his book *The Chaitanya Movement* writes thus :

“ Owing to the fact of his father-in-law's name being Vallabhacharya, it has been stated in some English works that Chaitanya was son-in-law to the founder of the Vallabhacharyas, and because of this fact, a relationship has been traced between the two sects. This is pure fiction, as Chaitanya's father-in-law was a Nadia householder, while the founder of the Vallabhacharyas was not only from the Deccan, but was a contemporary of Chaitanya himself. ”

In view of this lack of connection or collaboration of any kind between Vallabha and Chaitanya, the close parallelism between the movements they founded is, indeed, a very surprising phenomenon of religious life in India. Both the movements are essentially those of Bhakti, and the devotion to God that has manifested itself in them is deep, intense and passionate. Both of them are centred round Sri Krishna, especially as he has been depicted in the *Bhagavata* in the earlier period of his life. They had at first their chief shrines in that part of India which has been associated with Krishna's childhood and boyhood. In course of time they both came to have a large following, and ran like mighty rivers, one flowing eastward and the other westward, carrying with them love for and grace of God to millions of souls. One is surprised all the more at the rise and growth of these two religious bodies, especially in view of the fact that the time when they flourished was outwardly as unpropitious for them as it could be. Delhi was then the seat of a Moslem Empire, and many of the Provinces, including Bengal and Gujarata, were ruled by Moslem Princes.

The similarity between these two movements is worth studying in detail. Both of them are wholly devoted to the gospel of Bhakti as the sole means of salvation or rather as the very goal of life here and hereafter. The Lord in whom this Bhakti is centred is Sri Krishna as he was in his younger days. The Scripture, which both of them hold in the highest of veneration, is the *Bhagavata Purana*. The *Vraja-land* is for both of them the Holy Land *par excellence*, because it was there that Krishna passed his childhood and boyhood, the period of his life thought by them to be fully divine in his life.

There is, however, some difference between them which ought to be noted. This is due primarily to the special characteristics of each of the two teachers. Vallabha, while he was a mystic of a rare type, was at the same time something of an Acharya, a Philosopher and a Theologian. Because of this he created a philosophical system of his own to serve as a foundation for his movement. In this he had an advantage over Chaitanya, for with him both religion and philosophy had integrated themselves completely as in the case of Ramanuja and other Acharyas of the Bhakti-Marga. On the other hand, Chaitanya was primarily a Bhakta, and he took his philosophy wholesale from some of those who had preceded him, especially Nimbarka. Chaitanya had, however, a rare genius for Bhakti, because of which he became one of the most dynamic personalities that India has known. He wielded a tremendous influence on his own generation by the impact of his marvellous devotion, an influence which is still far from exhausted. In this he possessed undoubtedly a great advantage over Vallabha.

The difference between the two teachers is well brought out by the fact that while Vallabha passed much of his time in going all over India controverting the *Mayavada* of Shankara and preaching the Gospel of Bhakti through his reading of the *Bhagavata*, Chaitanya preached his Gospel chiefly by means of *Sankirtana*, which

is a kind of enthusiastic choral singing of the praise and name of God. Vallabha wrote many works in Sanskrit, some of them being commentaries on the Scriptures, whereas Chaitanya wrote only one poem of eight verses. It is true, because of this, Vallabha's appeal was to a wider public, in a way almost India-wide, but it was much less intense than that of Chaitanya, who did his work altogether in Bengali, his own vernacular.

Another important difference between the two teachers lies in the fact that while with Chaitanya and his followers, Radha plays a most important part in their religious life, so much so that Chaitanya is said to be an incarnation of Krishna as well as of Radha, she is out of picture more or less so far as Vallabha and most of his disciples are concerned. The latter believe that Krishna has a consort, but she is rarely spoken of as Radha, and the name given to her is *Swaminijee*, which means the Lady. The idea underlying this term is that she is married to Krishna. Vallabha and his followers, besides, concentrate their Bhakti on Krishna as the Divine Child. This makes their Bhakti one of the *Vatsalya* kind, which is the love of the parent for the child. This type of devotion is nearer their heart than the one known as *Madhurya*, i. e. the love of the Beloved for her Lover, as in the case of Chaitanya and his Church. It is true both these movements look upon the *Gopis*, the milkmaids of Vraja-land, as the ideal Bhaktas, but the sex-aspect in the Incarnation or in the Bhakta is not so emphasized by Vallabha and his Church as it has been by Chaitanya and his disciples.

Another important difference between the two movements lies in their attitude towards the world. It is true all Vaishnava Churches have a more positive feeling in regard to the life in this world than is the case with those who follow Shankara. In all probability the reason for this lies in the worship of Vishnu itself, for He is the Second Person in the Hindu Triad, whose work is the preservation of the world. There are, however, degrees of



difference between the Vaishnava Acharyas themselves in this matter. Among them Vallabha is the least ascetic of all, and it is perhaps no exaggeration to say that asceticism as such has no place in his system of thought and life. In this he is almost unique among Hindu religious teachers. He got a divine call to marry and become a householder just about the time when his mission as a religious teacher was entrusted to him by God Himself. Both these events took place simultaneously, which is perhaps the only instance of its kind in Hindu religious history. In strict conformity with this, he never preached asceticism, nor did he look upon ascetics as superior to house-holders. There is no ascetic order in his movement, which makes it an exception among the orthodox Vaishnava Churches.

In sharp contrast to this Chaitanya left his wife, mother, home and the world, just at the start of his ministry. He became a Sannyasi and remained one to the end of his days. It is true he asked later on two of his principal disciples, Nityananda and Adwaita, to enter into family life and be house-holders, in order that the leadership of the Church might remain in their families. Some of the *Goswamis*, i. e. the *Acharyas* of the Chaitanya Sampradaya, are the descendants of these two men. This is an affirmation of the world since there is in it a recognition of the life of the householder as in no way inferior to that of an ascetic. The orders of monks and nuns, however, came to be established in Chaitanya's Church in his own life-time or later on, and they have been ever since an essential feature thereof.

After mentioning these differences between Vallabha and Chaitanya, most of them in favour of the former, it must be said that in devotional dynamics, in emotional fervour and intensity, all the advantages lay with the latter. In a way Chaitanya stands by himself among the great Vaishnava teachers, for none has ever equalled, much less surpassed him in the devotion of the heart towards God. This may be due to the temperament of the



Bengalis who are the most impulsive of all people in India, but it is only partly so. In all likelihood it is the great devotee himself who, being so richly endowed with an emotional temperament, is responsible for the creation of that temperament. Bhakti came to him in a flood surging over all the banks of ordinary consciousness as to perhaps no man in India, and it passed on from him to the entire Bengali nation sweeping everything before it. It was given to him to create what was nothing less than a new type of Bhakti which, though it may not be perfect, was much nearer the ideal type than any other. His love for God was deep, unbounded and overwhelming, and it flowed through him to the whole of Bengal like the river Ganges, watering and fructifying the spiritual soil of an entire people. This Bhakti so sweetened him and lent such an aroma to his character, work and name that he has succeeded in captivating the heart of the entire Hindu world and even of non-Hindus as perhaps no other medieval saint or religious teacher of India has. So remarkable are his personality and character that he has become almost a world-teacher. The creative impulse that he imparted to the entire religious life in India is far from exhausted yet, and it might well be said of him that his all-India ministry began only some decades back. In the making of New India, his share is not a small one. It was from the rich treasures of his devotional life that the Brahma Samaj, the premier religious reform movement of modern India, drew its inspiration just at the moment when it became an all-India institution from a provincial one. It was largely the influence of the gracious personality of Sri Chaitanya that changed the Brahma Samaj overnight into a great spiritual force from the dry and rationalistic body that it was before. This transformation took place under the leadership of Keshub Chandra Sen, in whom Chaitanya had found a kindred spirit and a disciple. In Keshub's case, this was in a way a re-assertion and triumph of his own heredity, for he was a Vaishnava by birth though not by profession. It must be said, however, that his discipleship of Chaitanya was not an exclusive one, although it supplied a powerful strain of spiritual life to him and through him

to the whole of the Brahma Samaj and India. The work of Keshub, moreover, gave a great impetus to the revival of true Vaishnavism among the followers of Chaitanya themselves.

Another great man of New India who was influenced deeply by the example and character of Sri Chaitanya was Ram Krishna Paramhansa. The more one studies his life, the more one finds that he was at least as much of a Bhagavata as a Vedantin of Shankara's school. His Bhakti, which was deep and intense, was surely the product of the Vaishnava environment which is so prevalent in Bengal. Many of his favourite songs which he used to sing or make others sing, and which put him in his noted trances again and again, belonged to the hymnology of the Vaishnavas or of the Brahma Samaj. These last were again the product of the Bhakti inspired by the example of Chaitanya. Ram Krishna's influence has now gone far beyond the limited circle of his disciples or even Bengal, and, indirectly if not directly, Sri Chaitanya has quite a good share in it.

That Sri Chaitanya should have inspired both Keshub and Ram Krishna, two of the most spiritually-minded leaders of New India, is in itself one of the greatest tributes that could be paid to him. In addition to these, he has inspired innumerable men of our times, of whom only a few can be mentioned here. One of these was Bejoy Krishna Goswami. He belonged to one of the families of the Acharyas of the Chaitanya Church. He, however, coming in his youth under the influence of Keshub Chandra Sen, joined the Brahma Samaj, wherein he took a leading part in the Bhakti revival mentioned above. Later in life he left the Brahma Samaj and became an independent religious teacher with a small following of his own. He preached as such the Gospel of Bhakti in which the influence of the teachings and the life of Chaitanya predominated. Two other men, both of all-India fame, Bepin Chandra Pal and Chit Ranjan Das, came later in life under the spell of the spirit of Sri Chaitanya to such an extent that they

started what they called the neo-Vaishnava movement. These are only a few of a host of people who have been deeply touched and moved by the dynamic personality of the great Bhakta. It is perhaps no exaggeration to say that of all the great teachers of medieval India, there is none whose biography is read with such interest and spiritual profit as that of Sri Chaitanya all over the land.

It may also be added that Sri Chaitanya makes a universal appeal such as few teachers since the time of Gautama Buddha do. Beginning from the highest strata of society, the powerful influence of his personality filtered down in his own life-time to the lower and even the lowest stratas of the Hindu society. This has remained an essential feature of his movement ever since. It made converts of non-Hindus also. The spirit underlying it was so large that the Hindu Social Order, i. e. the Caste-system could not hold it, and the movement came to be divided into a number of small sects, some of which openly cut through that system. Such an appeal became possible because of the graciousness and beauty of the personality of Sri Chaitanya, his all-absorbing passion for God and the extreme importance he gave to the Name of God. All the Vaishnava Sampradayas have attached much significance to the Name of God, but Chaitanya and his followers have surpassed them all in this, and the Name stands with them for the Personality of God as with few others. They have emphasized, besides, the spiritual value of *Sankirtana* more than any other body. With them it is a kind of worship, and it has gone through a remarkable development, due mainly to the influence of the founder of the Church. No teacher or devotee abandoned himself so whole-heartedly to such worship, praising and adoring God not only with all his soul and spirit, mind and heart, but with his entire body as well. The religious dance accompanying this Sankirtana was seen at its highest in him. Nothing ever equalled in spiritual beauty, joy and fervour this outward expression of the innermost love and devotion of Chaitanya. Both soul and body melted into one through the deep, passionate and rapturous love that surged like a mighty fountain

from within, and were transfused into a glorious unity such as is rarely seen. The body became with him a perfect instrument of his soul, accompanying like a most delicate lyre the vibrations of a love that was divine. Since there went with this an unusual beauty of face and person, a character that was as holy and humble, as tender and loving as one could imagine, it is no wonder that this *Sankirtana* with its *Rasa* or dance, created a new epoch in the religious history of India. Itself an expression of the sublimest emotions in man, this dance was a living art of the loftiest kind, and it electrified and communicated itself easily to large masses of people. It became thus both a manifestation and a vehicle of Bhakti, helping the spread of the new Gospel in a remarkable manner. It assumed the form of ecstasy in Sri Chaitanya, an ecstasy of a new kind, and it propagated itself to hundreds and thousands. All, from the highest to the lowest in the land, saw it in him, were drawn by it to him and were conquered. This ecstatic dance accompanied by the soul-stirring music touched and thrilled the multitudes as they have rarely been, and it created a type of Vaishnavism which is unique in the annals of the Bhagavata Dharma.

Such a Teacher and a Bhakta was Sri Chaitanya, one of the most remarkable men that India has ever produced. The meeting together of such a person and Vallabhacharya, the two men who founded the two great Vaishnava Sampradayas of that time, is of no ordinary interest. The communion and fellowship between these God-possessed men must have been wonderful, to say the least, and one wishes there were fuller reports of their meetings and conversations than what are available. There are a few notices of these in the literature of the Vallabha Sampradaya, written in all probability from the angle of its vision. We shall make room for some of these here and begin with this :

“ Once upon a time Sri Vallabhacharya started for a pilgrimage to Jagannatha Puri. On his reaching Ganga Sagar, he met Sri



Chaitanya. They both had much loving fellowship with each other and they talked on many religious matters. In the course of one of their conversations, Sri Chaitanya said : "I am teaching my Vaishnavas to take the name of God every day one hundred twenty five thousand times." To this the Acharya replied: "I ask the Vaishnavas to take the name of God continuously, day and night, for I believe that if for one moment we cease to do so, we are apt to be possessed by evil thoughts." Then Sri Chaitanya said : "How is it possible for one to take the name of God unceasingly day and night?" Vallabhacharya replied : "When a potter makes vessels on his wheel, he does not move the wheel every moment with his stick, and yet it goes on moving. He sets it in motion and it goes on for some time, and he again gives it a push. In the same way we should set our mind in motion during the time of our worship and leisure in such a way that the same motion might continue during the time of our work and sleep. This is apparently difficult to understand, but it is true and not at all impossible. We should repeat the eight-worded *Mantra*, formula, *Sri Krishna is my Refuge* continually, and thus devote ourselves to God entirely."

"Talking in this way on such holy matters, Vallabhacharya stayed for some time with Sri Chaitanya. Then they both started for Puri. On the way further on they found two roads leading to the place. One of these was shorter, but it passed through a dense forest, while the other was the high-way and as such was safer. Sri Chaitanya proposed that they should go by the shorter route, but the Acharya said that it was not proper to do so since it involved some danger. He added that if they went by it and had some trouble from robbers etc., God would have to undergo special pain to save them, which they should avoid at all costs. Sri Chaitanya replied that he would go, nonetheless, by it as he was extremely eager to have the *darshana* of *Sri Jagdish*. Accordingly they parted company there.



"They met again in a few days in Puri when Sri Chaitanya said to the Acharya: "You were right in what you said. We went through the forest where I got separated from my companions and missed my way. I was then attacked by a mad elephant, but Sri Jagannathjee manifested Himself, and assuming a terrible form drove the animal away. Then I found the way again." The Acharya said: "It is good not to give any trouble to God as far as possible."

The conversation given here and the incident mentioned have a ring of truth about them, for they well illustrate the particular characteristics of each of these two Teachers. They show Chaitanya to be the more intense and eager and Vallabha the more equable of the two. We are not given the year of this meeting, but it took place possibly when Sri Chaitanya had not attained his maturity. Vallabha was senior to him in age, and being, besides, a great scholar and thinker, he was certainly more restrained.

Vallabha and Chaitanya met together in Vrandavana itself, the place most dear to both because of its association with Sri Krishna. They are said to have lived together for four months, the entire monsoon season in the year Samvata 1548 (A. D. 1492).<sup>\*</sup> Sri Chaitanya was eager to hear the exposition of the Bhagavata as given by Vallabha. They sat together for this purpose some hours every day for the entire season in a beautiful spot under a tree on Kashighata.

It was perhaps at this time that there cropped up a difference of opinion in regard to the question whether one should desire final salvation or not between Vallabha and Rupa, Sanatana and Jiva Goswami, three of the most important disciples of Chaitanya. These held that "so long as the evil desire for happiness and for

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<sup>\*</sup> This date can not be correct looking to the age of both of them.

salvation remained in the heart, the true love for God can never arise there." This was said in a verse composed by one of them, hearing which the Acharya said: "How can you describe the desire for salvation as an evil thing? To say this makes your verse unacceptable to all reasonable men; on the contrary they will find fault with it, because salvation is considered to be the highest attainment in all religions, and it is only in that state that one can have true Bhakti." Rupa and Sanatana agreed to this, but Jiva Goswami continued to discuss the matter for a long time. Chaitanya coming to know of this became very sorry and said to Goswami: "You have done something which is very wrong. It is tantamount to sinning against God and I shall renounce you henceforth." At this Goswami became exceedingly miserable, and thought within his mind that since he was renounced by his *Guru*, life had no meaning for him. He gave up food and drink, and going to the bank of the river Yamuna sat there waiting for death. He remained there for two days, when Vallabhacharya, coming to know of this, came to him and took him to Chaitanya. Jiva Goswami then begged both Vallabha and Chaitanya to forgive him, which they gladly did.

In the following we have a report of another meeting between these two great men, and it seems to have the impress of truth on it. Very likely it is the account of their first meeting. As given in *Nija Varta*, a kind of biography of Vallabha in Vrajabhāsa, it stands as follows:

"Then the Acharya proceeded on his way for the purpose of purifying the earth. While on his present journey, he met Sri Krishna Chaitanya in Manikarnitrilokinatha. The latter was extremely pleased to see the Acharya and said that he was very fortunate to have the blessing of his *darshana*. He then spoke of the great significance of the Name of God and added that one would get salvation if he fixed his mind on the lotus-feet of God in a proper way even for a moment. The Acharya replied to this that accord-

ing to his mind and belief, the heart of a devotee should not be moved away from God even for a single moment lest it might be possessed by evil powers. He added that that was the teaching of the *Pusti-Marga*."

There is an interesting sequel to this which might well be given here. It stands thus:

"When the Acharya said this in the hearing of several of his followers, Krishnadasa Meghana felt a doubt as to the possibility of keeping one's heart fixed on God all the time. The Acharya knew of this and would have solved the doubt if he had been asked about it. For the moment, however, he remained silent, and they all proceeded on their journey. A little further on they found a beautiful lake with a fine tree on its bank. Seeing this the Acharya said that it was a fine place for them to make their halt at for the noon. Accordingly they stopped there and began their preparations for the mid-day meal. Krishnadasa went in search of some leaves to serve as dishes. While he was looking out for these, he found a wild animal seated near the water. Being afraid he began to take the name of God loudly. Hearing this the animal leaped into the water and drank some of it. When it raised its head, Krishnadasa again repeated the name of God. At this the animal began drinking water. The same thing was done for the third time. Krishnadasa was much amazed at this. After gathering the leaves he went to the camp where the Acharya, seeing him, asked if his doubt had vanished. He replied that he would be relieved of it only when the Acharya had grace on him. The latter then told him that what he had seen on the bank of the lake carried a lesson for him. He added that the animal, though thirsty for a long time, did not drink water lest it might cease to take the name of God for the time, and that it was only when he (Krishnadasa) had taken the name of God in its hearing that it drank water. One should have such love for God and His Name. Krishnadasa was much pleased to hear this and his doubt disappeared."

In the following two stories the special characteristics of the movements founded by Vallabha and Chaitanya are well brought out. The first of these stands thus:

“In Gokula there is a *Bethaka* raised in memory of the association of the Acharya with the place. He used to take his meals where the Bethaka stands every day, and also teach the Bhagavata from there. The purpose of his manifestation was to teach the way of *Seva* (worship of God by personal service to the Image). At that time there were great saints and teachers at Vrandavana such as Krishna Chaitanya etc. They thought within their mind that they should serve Sri Nathjee. But they were told by Him that He should be served only by him who was His manifestation, and that they were given the portion of worshipping Him by the *Sankirtana*, i. e. singing His name and praise. Then one of these Vrandavana saints sent a Vaishnava of their own following to test the truth of this command of Sri Nathjee. This man called Shyamananda came to Gokula bringing with him a *Shalagrama*\* which he had kept in a packet. Hanging this on a branch of a tree close to the house of the Acharya, he went in and made his obeisance to the latter. When he came out from the house, he did not find the packet. He went again to the Acharya and complained to him of the theft. The Acharya replied that it was impossible that it should be taken by any of his disciples, and added that he should look for it again on the tree. On coming out the man found that the whole tree was full of similar packets hanging everywhere. He went again to the Acharya and told him what had happened. The latter then asked him to find out his own packet from amongst those that were there. As the man found it impossible to do this, the Acharya told him that it was strange he did not know the Shalagrama he worshipped, and asked him how it was possible for him to worship and serve it

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\* This is a peculiar kind of small stone used in the place of an Image of Sri Krishna because of its beauty, smoothness and place of origin. It is found only in a very small part of the bed of the river Yamuna.



properly if he could not do this: He then said to him to go again to the tree, which the man did and to his surprise found only his own packet. Taking it with him he went to the saints in Vranda-vana and told them what had happened. At this they were much amazed and said that Vallabhacharya had something divine in him, which made it possible for him to work such a miracle."

Whatever be the truth behind this story, it does bring out the difference between the two movements in a most important aspect of their life pretty well. It lies in this, viz., that the Chaitanya Sampradaya gave a central place in its life to Sankirtana, whereas the Sampradaya of Vallabha placed Image-worship in the centre of its life. This worship of the latter has many peculiarities of its own which have been described elsewhere. Here is another story which emphasizes the same difference:

"There was a man called Gopaldasa Godia, who was a disciple of Sri Chaitanya. He requested the latter to give him an Image which he might serve and worship. Sri Chaitanya gave him a Shalagrama for the purpose, but the man was not satisfied with this since he wanted an Image. He could clothe the latter, put ornaments on it and do such other things, which it was impossible for him to do in the case of the Shalagrama. He was much troubled in his heart at this. His anguish was all the greater because one whom he looked upon as his Guru had given him the Shalagrama, and this made it impossible for him to have an Image any more. He requested Sri Chaitanya to do something for him in the matter. At this the latter remained silent and gave him no reply. Later on knowing the great trouble of Gopaldasa on account of this he said to him in a dream: "I gave you what I could. I am given the command and the power to preach the Way, whereas Sri Vallabha has the power to manifest God through the Image. You should therefore see him when he comes and request him to give you an Image." Some time after this Gopaldasa saw Sri Vallabha, and telling him what had



happened, requested him to give him an Image. The Acharya replied: "Why do you want an Image? You have already got the Shalagrama? If you have true devotion, the Image will manifest itself out of the Shalagrama. You will be able to see it behind the Shalagrama, for God is able to do everything." The next day, Gopaldasa, at the time of his worship, found an Image behind the Shalagrama. This Image is still in Vrandavana being known as Radha Ramana. Gopaldasa then made a request to the Acharya to make him his disciple, to which the latter replied: "You are now a disciple of Sri Krishna Chaitanya, but in your future birth you will be initiated into our Way." This happened in course of time when he was re-born as Gopala Naga, a Vaishnava of the Vallabha Sampradaya."

We might add one more story which stands as follows:

"Once upon a time the Acharya came to Mathura with Prabhudasajalota Kshatri. The Acharya was offering his prayers after performing his ablutions in the river Yamuna. He had with him Prabhudasa and some other Vaishnavas. At that time Rupa and Sanatana, the two chief disciples of Sri Chaitanya, came to have his *darshana*. They, in the course of their conversation with him, asked him why it was that the Vaishnavas who were with him were so thin. The Acharya replied: "I told them not to accept our Way, but they would not listen to me. This is why they are suffering in the manner you see." The meaning of this reply was not understood by Rupa and Sanatana. Later on a follower of Sri Chaitanya, who was with them when this talk with the Acharya took place, went to Puri where Sri Chaitanya was. The latter on coming to know wherefrom this man had come asked him how the Acharya was. The man replied that he had seen the Acharya a short while ago and then related the talk that had taken place. Hearing this Sri Chaitanya fainted away and remained unconscious for some time. On coming to his senses he asked the man again to repeat to him what had been said by the

Acharya. The man did this with the result that Sri Chaitanya fainted away again. He remained unconscious for about twice the time that he did formerly. When he regained his consciousness, he asked the man again to tell him what had happened. The man did this and Sri Chaitanya became unconscious again. On coming to his senses he again asked the man what the Acharya had said. The man replied: "I can not say it again." Sri Chaitanya then said: "The thing is this: the meaning of what Sri Vallabha said can be known only by those who feel the pangs of separation from God. How is it possible for Rupa and Sanatana to know this ? " "

We might make room here for one more incident in the relationship of these two great men. It is as follows:

"Once upon a time Sri Krishna Chaitanya, while going from Bengal to Vrandavana, came to Adel where the Acharya was living after mid-day. The latter asked his wife to give him some food. She replied that as it was late in the day, all the food, which had been consecrated, had been used up, and added that no holy food would be available until the next offering to the Image was made.\* At this the Acharya fed Sri Chaitanya from the food which was prepared for the next offering. As this was an unusual proceeding on his part, one of his disciples asked him why this was done, whereupon the Acharya told him that Sri Krishna Himself resided in the heart of Sri Chaitanya and that because of it food given to him was an offering made to God."

We have said enough in the foregoing stories to show what kind of fellowship both these Teachers and Bhaktas had with one another. They also bring out some of the differences in their beliefs and practices. The agreement between them, however, is much greater than whatever difference there might be between

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\* The Vaishnavas of this Sampradaya eat no food that is not offered to the Image.

them. Both were founders of great Vaishnava movements of their time, and as such they had many things in common. They had the same set of Scriptures, the same theology more or less, the same devotion and ethics, and they were inspired by the same spirit and aim. They in their turn inspired millions in course of time, and though four centuries have elapsed since their advent their influence is still living. They have been able to mould in a very definite manner the culture and civilization of entire provinces. Indeed, both of them were men of God commissioned by Him to do a great work which they did in as full a manner as it was possible for them to do. The rise of two such Teachers at the same time is in itself a remarkable phenomenon of Hindu religious life. That they should have met often without influencing each other in any definite way only shows that both of them were profoundly original. There are some differences between them, but they are temperamental. They only show the rich treasure-house of Hindu spirituality.

We wish, however, there were fuller accounts of their meetings and of the conversations that took place between them on such occasions. These latter must have been a treat even to gods to listen to. We also wish that whatever is reported had been written by men who were not partisans. The accounts of their meetings as given in the literature of the Chaitanya Sampradaya are unfortunately far more biassed than those of the Vallabha Sampradaya, being written evidently with the purpose of depreciating Vallabhacharya. It is a case of trying to magnify their own Teacher at the expense of Vallabha. We are thankful, however, for whatever is given to us, for it is enough to show that both these men were two of the greatest men of their times in India, men who were wholly possessed by God and who delighted in seeing and loving in each other the God they worshipped.

## CHAPTER XVI

### Vallabha as an Author

In our study of Vallabha so far we have seen that he ~~was~~ an extraordinary scholar and preacher of religion. It remains for us now to see that he was a great author as well. He was this in virtue of his being an original thinker. By the time he had settled down in life in his later twenties, he had come to feel that he had a new message, even a Revelation, to give to the world, and he now seriously thought of presenting it in a systematic form. The term "new" used here in connection with his message is only a relative one, for none would have repudiated it more than Vallabha himself. All that he claimed for it was that it was entirely in conformity with the Scriptures, and that he was constrained by God Himself to put it before the world, because there were other interpretations of these Scriptures which were not proper. There was, however, a new element in his recognition of the Canon of the Vedic Scriptures, for he looked upon the Bhagavata Purana as a Scripture of the same rank as the Vedas, the Gita and the Brahma Sutras. This was a clear advance on the position taken up by most of the preceding Acharyas such as Shankara, Ramanuja, Nimbarka etc. He was anticipated by Madhva in this, but the philosophical system of the latter known as *Dwaitadwaita*, which was purely dualistic, was not acceptable to him. Having thus a new conception of the Scriptures and interpretation thereof, he thought of presenting it to the world in the well-recognised form of Bhashyas, i. e. commentaries, on some of the Scriptures.



In doing this, Vallabha had two objects in view, one positive and the other negative. He had already called his teaching Brahmapada. He now spoke of it as *Shuddhadwaita*, Pure Monism, and expounded it in a systematic manner. This was the constructive part of his teaching. It carried with it, however, the other part, which was to show the difference between his own teaching and that of the preceding Acharyas. Among these last Shankara's philosophical position was a special target for his criticism, and he contrasted his Brahmapada against what he called the Mayapada of the latter. Shankara's system was then in vogue among the intellectual classes in India, and since according to Vallabha it confounded the individual soul with God, he felt it his duty to controvert it in as thorough-going a manner as possible. He wrote his *Bhashya* on the Brahma-Sutras with this double purpose, a matter which he clearly expresses in the very beginning of the book.

To write such *Bhashyas* and especially one on the Brahma-Sutras is no ordinary undertaking. Whoever does it is looked upon as an Acharya. Shankara was the first of such Acharyas. He, by his extraordinary religious genius and intellect, created a new situation in the religious life of India. Ordinarily an Acharya is thought to be a mere interpreter of the Scriptures, but he is much more. Shankara became one in virtue of his creating a new reconstruction of the Vedic faith. He brought about a new synthesis of the Scriptures and the teachings of the great teachers who had preceded him. In all probability he was the first to recognise the triple Canon of the Vedic Scriptures, the Vedas including the Upanishads, the Bhagavad-Gita and the Brahma-Sutras. This alone constituted one of the greatest services he rendered to the Vedic Dharma. Incidentally he accepted therewith the belief in the progressive character of the Vedic Revelation. Room was thus made for a dynamic conception of religion among the Hindus. The Gita had already recognised this, but it is doubtful if that book itself was recognised as a Scripture, equal in



value to any other, before Shankara. To accept all these as Scriptures, and to organise them into a full-orbed theological, philosophical and religious system, required an extraordinary intuition, a deep philosophical insight, a profound knowledge of all the Scriptures together with their auxiliaries, and high intellectual powers. To give a proper expression to such beliefs and convictions required, besides, rare literary talents. Shankara possessed all these gifts to a remarkable extent, and it was this which made it possible for him to give a new orientation to the Vedic religion. Along with this, incidentally as it may be, he defined the character and scope of the work of an Acharya as well. The fact that there have been only three or four Acharyas in the full sense of the term in the wake of Shankara, shows well how difficult it has been to attain to such an eminent position.

Vallabha knew this well and it is doubtful if he ever aimed at being an Acharya. He never called himself one even in those books of his in which he could have claimed that title. He was satisfied with calling himself *Vallabhadixita*, the latter half of this compound term being his family name. In all probability this was due to his modesty and humility which would not allow him to be known as an Acharya. That he did not have the ambition to be such is testified to by the fact that he never finished his Bhashya of the Brahma-Sutras. And yet here lies the wonder that in spite of this he has come to be recognised universally as such. This is in virtue of the fact that he had all the powers requisite for the purpose, and that whatever work he has done through his writings and the movement of life and thought he created is as extraordinary as only an Acharya of the front rank can show.

Vallabha's work as an author has been so significant for its interpretative and constructive character that in spite of almost all his books, small as well as big, being fragmentary in character, he has found a place among the few Acharyas of India. Not only

was his mind profoundly original, but there is in his books, some of them at any rate, a kind of authority born of inspiration from God. He was conscious all the time of having been entrusted with a divine mission, and it is this which is reflected in his writings. He was a mystic and a devotee, and one who felt himself to be an Apostle of God. This consciousness gives a distinctive character to much of what he wrote. Profoundly intellectual as he is, whatever he says and writes is tinged deeply with the religious spirit. His intellect has the sharpness of a keen razor, but he cuts open things in order to fill them with the balm of devotion. This is why his books have not the character of massiveness or strength as those of his three great predecessors, Shankara, Ramanuja and Madhva. He makes up for this lack, however, by a much greater measure of delicacy and tenderness. Compared to the latter two Acharyas, he is a more thoroughgoing representative of the Dispensation of the Bhakti-Marga which has made all things new in the Hindu religious world. He amplified the Canon of Hindu Scriptures by introducing the Bhagavata in them, and though he was anticipated in this by Madhva, his devotion to that Purana was in all likelihood much more single-minded than that of Madhva. It may be that the latter had prepared the ground for him, but Vallabha has been on the whole far more thoroughgoing in following the New Dispensation to its logical conclusion. For this he was considered an innovator and the strictly orthodox Hindus of his time, especially the Shankarites, looked upon him as a heretic, almost if not altogether. They have persisted to this day in holding this view of Vallabha's school of thought and Church, and controversies are going on continuously between the followers of both Shankara and Vallabha. For their advocacy of the Bhagavata as a Scripture at least equal in importance to the Gita and their non-recognition of the Varnashrama Dharma as of capital importance, the latter have been considered non-orthodox, and many Shankaracharyas have hurled anathemas again and again at them.

Among the writings of Vallabha, the book that has given him a place among the Immortals of religious literature in India, is his *Bhashya* on the Brahma-Sutras. It is this which has earned him the title Acharya. These Sutras, composed by Badrayana Vyasa, form the text and manual of what is called the Uttara Mimansa. This is known as the Vedanta, one of the six well-known systems of Hindu Philosophy. Several teachers of note had preceded Vallabha in writing commentaries on this great work, and since the latter felt that he had a new view and interpretation of it to give, he thought it proper to write the book.

This Bhashya of Vallabha is known as *Anu Bhashya*, the small or diminutive commentary. It is rather difficult to know why it has been called by this name. Several suggestions are made as to its origin, but they are only guesses. It is doubtful if the name was given by Vallabha himself. For one thing he never finished the book, writing his commentary only on about two-thirds of the Brahma-Sutras. It is said, however, by some of his followers that he wrote another commentary on the same work, a much bigger book which he called the Brihad-Bhashya, the big commentary. It was, as has been said by some, in contrast to this book that the present one was called Anu Bhashya. The chief protagonist of this theory was the late Mr. T. Telivala. Unfortunately for this theory there is no other commentary of Vallabha on the Sutras available at present, nor is there any mention of it in the writings of any of the important successors of Vallabha. In the absence of this, all the proof which Mr. Telivala has been able to bring forward for his theory is from Vallabha's own writings, a testimony which, to say the least, is very meagre. Vallabha makes no mention of this Brihad Bhashya in Anu Bhashya, which is very strange in view of the fact that this latter book is said to be an abridgement of the former. It may be that Vallabha contemplated writing a big commentary, for which he may have prepared some notes, and that whatever reference may be found in any of his writings is in regard to a book that was to be

written in the future. As a matter of fact even this Anu Bhashya is not a complete work. This theory is, besides, far from accepted by all the scholars of Vallabha's Church.

It is said with good reason that the name Anu Bhashya does not come from Vallabha. In all probability it originated with his son Vitthalanatha who finished the work. The latter in view of this joint-authorship may have thought it proper to give it a modest title. It is said by some that this title was chosen to distinguish the character of the teaching of the book from that of the philosophy of Shankara. According to Vallabha the size of the soul is as small as an *Anu*, which means an atom, while Shankara holds the soul to be infinite.

Whatever this be, this Bhashya is not a small book. The joint-authorship, though not mentioned explicitly, is implied in one or two places. It is, besides, evident in the difference in thought and language between the two parts of the book. Vallabha wrote his commentary as far as 3-2. 33, the rest being written by his son almost a generation later. It has been held by some that Vallabha wrote this work in the early part of his career. If this be true, one wonders why he never finished it. To write such a Bhashya was one of the most important things he was doing, and he would not have left it incomplete if he could have helped it. Very likely he started writing it in the latter period of his life, and failed to finish it because he took up some more urgent tasks.

It is in this book that Vallabha expounds his system of philosophy known as *Shuddhadvaita* or Pure Monism. This is his interpretation of the Vedanta as defined in the Brahma-Sutras of Badarayana Vyasa. It differs from that of several of the preceding Acharyas in important respects, which was the sole reason for his writing it. Some of the characteristic features of Vallabha's teaching as presented in this work, have been described by us in a chapter by itself.



In the Church of Vallabha the Anu-Bhashya is rightly considered a standard work, one of its chief glories. It is as a matter of fact the foundation on which its existence rests. Because of this and the original character of the teaching contained in it, this work has given rise to a large crop of literature in the form of commentaries, glosses etc. Some of these are described elsewhere in the present work.

Vallabha is said to have written, besides, a Bhashya and a Karika, on the Purva Mimansa. This Mimansa is the text of another of the six Schools of Hindu Philosophy and is usually coupled with the Uttara Mimansa mentioned above. They both are called Mimansas, Investigations, because they inquire into the truth of the Scriptures. The Purva Mimansa or the former Investigation, deals with the Vedas, especially in relation to the sacrifices and rituals enjoined therein, whereas the Uttara Mimansa, the later Investigation concerns itself with the Upanishads, the knowledge portion of the Vedic Scriptures. The Purva Mimansa defines the *dharma*s and the *karma*s, ritualistic and other duties of the believers in the Vedas, because of which it is considered very valuable. It shows the proper path and discipline for the believers. Of the two books that Vallabha wrote on this, only the Karika is available.

Both these Mimansas stand opposed to each other in some respects holding different opinions in regard to a number of fundamental problems such as the existence of God, the creation of the Universe etc. Whatever difference there may have been between them was emphasised and accentuated by Shankara to such an extent that they came to be looked upon as standing in sharp contrast to each other. This antagonism was softened to some extent by what is called the *Sammuchchaya*vada of Ramanuja, a kind of synthesis between knowledge, action and devotion. Vallabha's aim in writing his Karika on the Purva Mimansa was to show that both the Mimansas, instead of being antagonistic in any way,



are complementary to one another. His position is that it was not within the scope of the first investigation to enter into metaphysical questions such as the existence of God etc., especially as it had confined itself to the task of defining the ritualistic duties and obligations of the believers. He says that it did not deny the existence of God or the creation of the universe by Him, and that what was thus left undone by it was done by the other Mimansa. Vallabha made room thus for Karmas in his Bhakti-Marga, which makes the latter ethical and affirmative of the world. For this teaching of his, he is called by his followers *Karma-Marga-Pravartaka*, the Teacher of the path of action.

Vallabha wrote several small books dealing with various problems of Metaphysics or Conduct of Life. Sixteen of these are grouped together under the title *Sandash Granthas*, Sixteen Books, and because they contain in them much of the essence of Vallabha's teaching, they have assumed the place of almost the Gospel of his Church. There is no visible unity among these books or rather booklets, since they were written at different times and sprang out of different needs. They are, besides, extremely fragmentary in character. In spite of this, since they are the products of a great man, who had attained to a high level of integrity of thought and spiritual life there is one spirit pervading them all. They are written in a style that is *sautric*, aphoristic, which makes it difficult at times to follow their meaning. Because of this and of the important place they hold in Vallabha's Church, the number of commentaries in Sanskrita, Hindi and Gujarati on the various units, amount to about a hundred or even more. These are the most popular of Vallabha's writings.\*

Vallabha wrote another important work called *Tattvartha Dipa Nibandha*, an Essay on the Light of Knowledge. This is bigger in size than all the sixteen books mentioned above put

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\* Fourteen of these books we have translated and added to this work as an appendix.

together. It is a sort of a manual of his system wherein he traces an outline of his theology and way of life. He refutes in passing several of the theories advanced by other teachers, but his main object is to show the way he has found to the people. The book is a very successful attempt to harmonise all the Scriptures in the light of the Bhagavata Purana, which, to Vallabha, is their crown and fulfilment. The Essay is a string of sutras, aphorisms, which, because of their condensed thought, are not always easy to follow. Vallabha himself wrote a commentary on the book called Prakasha, and a great author and scholar of his Church, Purushottamarai wrote another commentary called Avaranabhanga. The book is so difficult to follow that only the first chapter thereof dealing with the Scriptures has been translated into Gujarati.

One of the most important works of Vallabha is his commentary on the Bhagavata Purana called Sri Subodhinijee. This was the work closest to his heart. He had taught the Purana for years to his loving disciples and the public, and he now gave his understanding and interpretation thereof to the world in the form of this book. According to him the aim of the Bhagavata Purana is to make it possible for all, including Sudras and Women, to realize the Presence of God in their own heart and outside in the world. This is in virtue of the fact that the Bhagavata tells us the story of God's Lila, His gracious sport, in His full incarnation as Sri Krishna. The Bhagavata is even more than this in Vallabha's eyes; for him it is a kind of Rupa, Form of God Himself, and this can be understood and realized only by those who are pure in heart and free from all worldly desires. The control of one's senses and right knowledge are essential to an appreciation and understanding of this Rupa. The true followers of the Bhagavata, called Mahabhagavata by Vallabha, are only those who are devoted entirely to God and have no respect for the conventions of the world as such. Theirs is the true Bhakti, and such devotion is the natural atmosphere of the soul.

Even actions or *Karmas*, when performed with such Bhakti, are helps rather than hindrances to the progress of the soul towards God.

Vallabha is said to have started the writing of this commentary on his return from a pilgrimage to Jagannatha Puri at the place where the river Ganges meets the sea. He stayed there for some months with his disciple Madhava Bhatta dictating to him his book. When he had finished the first three books of the Bhagavata, a command came to him from God to return to Heaven from the earth. He, however, considered the writing of this commentary a matter of such importance that he continued his work disregarding the express command of God. He skipped over the next six books of the Bhagavata, from the fourth to the ninth, and took up the writing of the commentary on the tenth book of the same. In his eyes the tenth *skandha* was the most important part of the Bhagavata; since the Purana was a form of God to him, this book was the very heart of God. As is well-known this Skandha deals with the life of Sri Krishna. While he was busy with this work in Madhuvana near Mathura, another call came to him from God to leave the world. This too he disregarded with a view to finish the commentary. He finished soon the tenth book, and had written only a part of the eleventh, when the call came again. He hastened to obey it, leaving his work unfinished. The commentary, thus, is left incomplete.

The way in which this commentary was written shows the high place given to it by Vallabha in his writings. It may be said to have been written by him while standing on the brink of death, especially the tenth and eleventh books thereof. For a man of his devotion and faithfulness to God, to have disregarded the distinct call of God twice, was no ordinary matter. It was something like an inward crucifixion, which he bore only for the sake of doing something which he considered to be of very great significance. The book may thus be regarded as an oblation of his very heart to God.

Vallabha wrote another book on the *Bhagavata* called *Sukshama Tika*, which was in accordance with his usual practice of writing a double series of books on some of the great Scriptures. This book is not considered to be of such importance as *Sri Subodhinijee*.

Besides the books mentioned above, Vallabha is said to have written several small ones. The number of books said to have been written by him is eighty-four, which evidently is a legendary figure, the number of his disciples and *Bethakas*, i. e. monuments raised in his memory, being the same. Among the books which are undoubtedly his are the *Patravāmbana*, *Shruti-Gita* and *Siksha-sloka*. The first of these we have mentioned already in connection with his controversy with the pundits of Benares. The second is a kind of commentary on the *Veda-Stuti*, the adoration by the Vedas of Sri Krishna, which is one of the finest Psalms given in the *Bhagavata*. The last book was written almost at the very end of his life and has been dealt with elsewhere.

Vallabha wrote in all about thirty books, big and small, during a period of as many years. Several of these are extremely small, consisting of only a few couplets, and only three or four are big in size. In view of this Vallabha could not be said to be a voluminous writer. It seems he wrote only when he was constrained by his inner spirit to do so. This may also be the reason why he is never discursive. He condenses as much matter as possible in the shortest compass, which makes much of his writing aphoristic in character. He writes, besides, with authority, being fully convinced in his mind that what he writes is the absolute truth. He rarely, if ever, tries to embellish his thought with any outward ornaments, eschewing rhetoric altogether. His language is never flowery, and very little of what he has written is diffuse in thought or language. In this his son Vitthalanatha presents quite a contrast to him as is evident from the two types



of writing in the Anu-Bhashya. Vallabha writes as a theologian and philosopher and aims only at the teaching of religious truth. It seems that his mind, as expressed in his books, is moulded more by the Upanishads, the Gita and the Brahma-Sutras than by any of the Puranas. At any rate he seems to have taken the former as his models for his writing. He is remarkably objective in all he writes and rarely allows his emotions or imagination to interfere with the portraiture of Truth as he sees it. He had a vision of the Truth and the Way to attain it, which he called Brahmavada and Pusti-Marga respectively. Since this was a New Dispensation, he took it to be his mission to define fully the character and scope of it, especially as he had to establish the truth of it before a world which was indifferent and even hostile. That he did this work extremely well is undoubted. His works have served as a sure foundation for one of the most important Churches in India in spite of the fact that most of them are incomplete and fragmentary in character.

Vallabha wrote all his books in Sanskrit. There were several reasons for this. At the time when he lived, the only literature in the vernaculars of India was poetry and Vallabha was not a poet. He had, moreover, no vernacular of his own. He was by birth a Telugu and probably the language that he used in the immediate circle of his family was the same. He lived, however, most of his life in an area where Hindi and Vrajabhasha were spoken by the people. He used in all probability both these languages in his dealings with his disciples. He was thus compelled by circumstances to use a number of languages, of which Sanskrit could be the only vehicle for his literary work. The character of this work, besides, it being mostly expository of the Scriptures, demanded the classical language for its use. This gave Vallabha one great advantage, viz., a wider appeal to an all-India public. The day of the vernaculars was dawning just then; and the epoch of classical religious literature more or less closed with him. He was the last of the Acharyas.



## CHAPTER XVII

### **Vallabha's Renunciation and Passing Away**

It has been already said that Vallabha received a call from God to leave the world altogether while he was returning from Jagannatha Puri at Gangasagar. He had then just begun his commentary on the Bhagavata, and since he considered this work to be of much importance for the purpose of spreading the Gospel entrusted to his care, he felt that he might wait a little longer before responding to the call. He, then, hastened to finish the work. While he was in Vraja-land, the call came to him again. He had not yet finished the commentary, and so he again waited, but before he was through with it, the call came for the third time. It was impossible for him now to go on with the book. The call was too insistent to be left unheeded. He then told both his mother and wife that the time had come for him to renounce the world. They heard him with consternation. He on his part consoled them with the thought that God's command must be obeyed under any circumstances. His beloved disciple Damodardasa wanted to follow him in this as he had done hitherto in everything, but Vallabha prevailed upon him not to renounce the world as he, having never married, was a kind of Sannyasi all his life. He had, besides, received no direct call from God for such a radical step.

Vallabha then wrote his booklet *Sannyasa Nirnaya*, the Determination of Renunciation, defining therein Renunciation according to the New Dispensation. This book is one of the sixteen mentioned already. According to Vallabha, Renunciation is meant for the sole

purpose of experiencing in a most acute form the soul's separation from God. This to him is the highest of spiritual experiences which a human being can have in this life, it being a prelude to the deepest of communion and fellowship with God. From Vallabha's example it would seem that such a fellowship could be had only after one's death.

Vallabha is said to have, then, sent for Madhavendrapuri, the Sannyasi belonging to the Church of Madhva, whom we have already mentioned in connection with the shrine of Sri Govardhan-nathjee. The latter ordained him as a Sannyasi and gave him the name Purnananda. Vallabha remained in solitude in a room in his own house for about a week, and then he left home for good. For about a week more he lived on one of the banks of the river Ganges while going to Benares. He took eighteen days to reach the holy city since he went slowly seeing his disciples on the way. In Benares itself he remained for seven days at the Hanumana Ghat on the bank of the river Ganges, preparing himself solemnly for entering the waters thereof for the purpose of leaving the world altogether. About this time, both his sons, Gopinatha and Vitthalnatha, together with a number of his disciples, came and requested him to tell them what they should do in his absence. In reply to this, Vallabha, who had taken the vow of silence along with that of renunciation, wrote three couplets and a half on a stone lying close by. Their meaning in English is as follows:

“If you become divorced from God in any way, your body, mind and all things pertaining to yourself that belong to Time, will devour you; this is my belief.

“God, who is Krishna, is not of this world, nor does He have respect for anything pertaining to the world. Therefore we must love Sri Krishna alone. God is all-in-all here and in the other world. Hence Sri Krishna, the Lord of the Gopis, is alone worthy of our service with all our body and mind, soul and spirit.

He alone will give you everything useful in this world and in the next. ”

It is said that after these verses were written, Sri Krishna manifested himself on the spot and wrote the following one and a half verses.

“ If you have faith in Me, Who am the beloved of the Gopis, you will be saved, and you need not have sorrow on any account. Salvation is the abiding in one's original form after renouncing all others. ”

Vallabha then entered into the waters of the Ganges and disappeared from the world for ever. It is said that he was taken immediately by God in the form of a bright flame which rose from the river and was seen by the people who had assembled there. Dr. H. H. Wilson in his book *Hindu Religion* speaks of the event as follows:

“ Having accomplished his mission, he is said to have entered the Ganges at Hanuman Ghat, when stooping into the water he disappeared; a brilliant flame arose from the spot and in the presence of a host of spectators, he ascended to heaven and was lost in the firmament. ”

This event took place on the third day of the bright half of the month of Ashad in the year Samvata 1587 ( 1532 A. D. ).

It is worthy of note that Dr. Wilson describes the passing away of Vallabha in the words quoted above without adding any comments of his own. This is indeed extremely creditable to him and is in sharp contrast to the way in which an event of this kind would be treated by biased critics of the West, especially Christian missionaries. They have done this in regard to Sri Chaitanya who is said to have passed away in the year 1438 A. D. by drowning in the sea near Puri. It is doubtful if he actually passed away in this manner, for some of his biographers have

given another version of his death. Mr. M. T. Kennedy, in his book *The Chaitanya Movement*, does not look upon this tradition to be true. It has, however, served as a handle in the hands of many Western writers for depreciating Hinduism. If the same is not done in regard to Vallabha, it is largely because his life has not been of much interest to these men so far.

Any way, while reading of this incident, the question is sure to arise in the minds of many whether Vallabha did the right thing in seeking his death in this manner. Some people might well call it suicide even. There is no doubt that Vallabha took this step deliberately with all his consciousness widely awake. The thing was not done at the bidding of a momentary impulse, nor was it the result of a sudden frenzy due to ecstatic emotion. He was singularly free from impulsiveness of any kind all through his life. He never had, besides, supernatural experiences of any kind, nor was he given to having abnormal or supernormal trances or ecstasies of any sort. He heard twice the command of God to leave this world, but since he had a most important work to finish, he deliberately disobeyed it both times. He himself says this and has no regrets about it, much less repentance, for he is fully assured in his mind that the work he was doing, viz., the writing of the commentary on the Bhagavata, had the good pleasure of God behind it. It was only when the call persisted in coming for the third time that he gave up everything including his life at its behest. He took this step, therefore, with full deliberation, which makes it an act of laying down his life at the altar of God.

It is true such a thing does not commend itself to our mind to-day. This is largely due to the fact that our standards of life and conduct are different from those of the medieval period. Deliberate laying down of one's life, however, is as much in vogue to-day as it ever was and in certain circumstances it evokes our unstinted admiration. For example, when a man or a woman

dies out of sheer love for one separated from him or her by death, we admire the act instinctively and feel that something extraordinary has been done. We have known of one case in which even an English official highly admired a woman for becoming a Suttee after all his attempts to persuade her not to be one had failed owing to her intense love for her husband. So far as we know Romeo has never been condemned by any of the literary critics for dying because he thought Juliet had died. There are occasions when we all admire Japanese knights or men of knightly spirit for performing what they call *Harakiri*. Recently the whole world was full of praise for the Captain of the German Battleship Graf Spee on his committing suicide after his ship was destroyed. We always give honour to people who lay down their lives to retrieve their personal or national honour, or for the purpose of saving their country from humiliation due to conquest. A very notable example of such heroic sacrifice for one's country has been supplied by the people of Finland, who had the courage to fight with Russia knowing full well that they would be wiped out.\* Forming *Suicide Clubs* they marched out boldly and joyfully to meet death in defence of their country. If people can do this not only without blame but evoking much admiration from the world, one wonders why a man may not lay down his life at what he considers to be a definite command of God in order that he may come nearer to Him. Such a thing seems to us rather strange because only a few people in the whole of human history have done it. It does not come within the range of ordinary experience. This should not make it less heroic or praiseworthy. We for our part do not think it proper to judge Vallabha in this step of his, much less condemn him for it. There is something in it which refuses to be judged by our ordinary standards, and we stand before it amazed. It is something corresponding to Sutteeism at its highest, and on a far

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\* This refers to the war between Russia and Finland before Germany entered into war with the former. At that time Finland had no chance of a victory over Russia. This made its heroism unique.



higher plane. This is perhaps the only instance of its kind in history, which should not make it the less valuable.

That Vallabha's soul was on fire, an all-consuming fire, to meet his Lord, is amply proved by the words we have quoted above. These are some of the noblest words ever uttered by man on the brink of death. They bear on them, besides, the seal of his death as a testimony to their intense reality. They show what he lived and died for, revealing a perfect correspondence between his teaching and life. They contain the very essence of his life, giving thus the lie direct to such phrases as "Vallabha practice" and "Vallabha epicureanism" used by Christian missionary writers with reference to the abuses that grew in his Church in later times. To couple them with Vallabha's name is to do him, who was essentially a man of God, the grossest of injustice.

These verses are, besides, the last Will and Testament of Vallabha not only for his sons and disciples, but for the whole of humanity. They are a permanent challenge to his followers to keep their faith as pure as possible, without mingling with it not only any sensual elements but even secular ones. He makes no other provision for his two sons, who were boys of about seventeen and fifteen years respectively but the one contained in these words asking them to have absolute faith in God alone. It is doubtful if he made any special arrangements for his family or for the conduct of his Sampradaya before taking his Sannyasa. This shows his extraordinary faith in God, which alone he leaves as his sole heritage to all his children, whether by blood or spirit. May they all live up to it for long, long to come!

## BOOK II

### CHAPTER I

#### **The Bhagavata Dharma**

It has been already said that Vallabha was a religious genius. He was, besides, profoundly intellectual and a true philosopher. Early in life he had realized the necessity of re-interpreting the Hindu Scriptures in the light of his religious experience and philosophical convictions. The prevailing schools of Hindu religious philosophy in his time were those of the Vaishnavas and of Shankara. The former of these were those of Ramanuja, Nimbarka, Madhva etc., and in spite of there being some differences among them they formed a body of thought which was homogeneous in many respects. This was true especially in regard to their belief in God as the Supreme Person or *Purushottama*, the belief in human souls as separate from God, and in salvation through Bhakti. They all preached the Bhakti-Marga, this being the chief bond between them. They were known, besides, for their intense religious life and wider humanitarian appeal. Philosophy was not with them a matter of primary concern, and if it found an important place in the Vaishnava schools of thought and life, it was largely because Shankara, who had preceded them all, had given it a high place. In view of this, the Vaishnava Churches had to make their philosophical position clear.

As for Shankara's school of thought, it had existed for nearly seven hundred years before Vallabha made his appearance.

Shankara, who is said to have been born in 788 A. D.,\* lived only for thirty-two years, during which short period he did a piece of work that is as remarkable as any in the religious history of humanity. He re-organized the Vedic religion and brought order into what was reduced to chaos under the influence of decadent Buddhism and Jainism. In all probability religion in general and Vedic religion in particular had fallen on evil days for some centuries before the advent of Shankara. Both Jainism and Buddhism had lost much of their spirit and had degenerated into hair-splitting intellectual systems of various kinds. The Vedic religion had found some defenders against these, chief of them being Shabara Swami and Kumarila Bhatt. Not only did these men hold their own against Buddhism, which was the stronger of the two non-Vedic religions, but they and especially Kumarila carried the war literally into the enemy's camp. It is a popular belief that Shankara's main work was done in regard to the rehabilitation of the Vedic religion against Buddhism, but this is not quite true. A good part of such work was already done before Shankara appeared. Kumarila had waged war, in the realm of both thought and life, against Buddhism, and he is said to have gone to the length of even persecuting the followers of that faith in a severe manner. A writer of note called Madhava, who appeared in about the beginning of the 14th century, says in his book *Shankara-Vijaya* that it was Kumarila who influenced Prince Sudhanva to extirpate the Buddhists. Another book, or rather Ms. called *Kerala Uppatti*, a kind of history of Malabara, corroborates this statement and speaks of that part of India as the theatre of his work. According to it Kumarila had succeeded in driving out the Buddhists from Malabara about a century before Shankara appeared.

This work was an integral part of the Vedic Renaissance which was bound to come sooner or later as a reaction against

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\* There are differences of opinion about the date of birth of Shankara. Telang put it into the middle or the end of the sixth century while Dr. Sir Ramkrishna Bhandarkar gave for it the year 680 A. D.

both Buddhism and Jainism. This Renaissance had begun about the fourth century A. D., and probably it was in full swing, at any rate in certain parts of India, by the time Shankara came. These defenders of the Vedic religion, however, were protagonists of the Karma-Kanda, the Way of Ritualistic Works. Theirs was a movement back to the Vedas and some of them almost discarded the Upanishads. A few of these Karma-Kandis even went to the length of attacking the Jnana-Marga, the Way of Knowledge shown in these latter books.

A protest, however, was raised against such teaching and it began with Gaudapada. He is said to be "the first systematic exponent of the Advaita Vedanta." He gave an exposition of his system of philosophy in his famous *Karika*. It is interesting to note that he takes his stand only on one of the Upanishads, viz., the Mandukya. He was influenced in his thought by some of the Buddhist schools prevailing in his time, but the chief merit of his work lay in the fact that he provided this borrowed thought with a sort of Upanishadic substratum. So close is the similarity between his thought and the Buddhist Vignanavada and the Madhyamic school that he himself is fully conscious of it and takes special pains to say that what he expounds is not Buddhism. He has much in common with Nagarjuna, the celebrated Buddhist philosopher, and comes perilously near the nihilistic position-Shunyavada-of the Buddhist Madhyamikas. The close resemblance between the two has led some to say that he was a Buddhist, and that he wrote the Buddhist Madhyamika Karika.

Gaudapada had a disciple called Govinda and Shankara was a disciple of the latter. The mantle of Gaudapada had, thus, fallen on Shankara's shoulders, and the movement started by the former was carried to its full length by the latter. As has been said before, Gaudapada's movement was a return to the Upanishads or to the Jnana-Kanda, deeply tinged as it was by Buddhist thought. It was a kind of re-orientation of the Upanishadic Way of

Knowledge in the light of one of the most important Buddhistic schools of thought. Shankara allowed this to remain, more or less, as the basis of his work, but he built thereupon a superstructure which has been something of a marvel in the history of religion.

Shankara was, undoubtedly, one of the greatest religious geniuses the world has known, and there had appeared none like him in India after Mahavira and Buddha. As a philosopher, he was perhaps the greatest that this country has known. He was, besides, a mystic and a most practical one at that. In him religion, philosophy and power of organization were all combined as in few men, and when we remember that he died at the early age of thirty-two years, we can not but wonder at the marvellous piece of work he did. What was done by Buddha and Asoka in the course of some three centuries, he attempted to do and partly succeeded in doing within such an extremely short time. Of course he was able to do this great work because the ground had been prepared for him by both Jainism and Buddhism on the one hand and by the revivalists of the Vedic religion on the other. It fell to his lot to reap the harvest of the efforts of all these and to fuse some of the best elements of their work into a new and rich harmony by means of his profound genius. A *rapprochement* between the two non-Vedic religions on the one hand and the Vedic religion on the other was taking place in the midst of their clash all the time, and it was almost finished, especially on the ethical plane, by the time Shankara came on the scene. It is worth noting, however, that in all his work, Shankara met with the greatest opposition from the Vedic Karma-Kandis. His chief opponent was Mandana Misra, whom he succeeded in converting to his views.

The true greatness of Shankara lies in his organizing the Vedic religion with the Vedanta as its crown. He did this work in the realm of philosophy as well as in that of institutionalism. He rendered thus to India a unique service, because it is his work which lies at the foundation of what we now know as Hinduism. The use



of the term *Hindu* is modern and it had no significance at the time of Shankara. The Moslems were the first to use it on a large scale for the indigenous people of the land, and it carried with it a sense of inferiority since it was used by the conquerors of the country for those who were conquered. In course of time the people adopted the term as their designation, and the sting that lay underneath it disappeared. The same is true in regard to the term *Hindu Dharma* or Hinduism. As a matter of fact this latter term has come into use much later than the term Hindu. It may be added that both these words have never had a definite connotation, their meaning varying with different people and at different times. Taking the word Hinduism to mean the religion based on the Vedas and to cover any manifestation thereof, whatever be its special characteristics, there is no doubt that Shankara was its founder and he gave it an all-India form and character. That he should have been able to do this without the backing of any great temporal power makes us wonder all the more at his achievement. Herein lies the significance of what is known as his *Digvijaya*, Universal Conquest.

Shankara is said to have conquered the whole of Arya-varta on the religious plane. The fact that he established the four Episcopates in the four corners of this vast country amply testifies to this conquest of his. That these Episcopates of Sringeri in the South, Puri in the East, Dwarka in the West and Badrinatha in the North, should still be functioning shows how deep were the foundations laid by him. The Shankaracharyas of these places are even to-day the living symbols of Hinduism having an authority and prestige which the Acharyas of no other body have. This is in virtue of the fact that Shankara established what we may well call the National Church of the Hindus.

Along with this institutional work Shankara wrote commentaries on the principal Upanishads, the Bhagavad-Gita and the Brahma-Sutras. His Bhashya on the Sutras alone is sufficient to

show the remarkable character of his mind and profoundly religious spirit. In all probability he was the first to write commentaries on these three-fold Scriptures and to show thereby their unique value in the large body of Hindu religious literature. Gifted as he was with one of the most original minds in history, he gladly submitted it to what he firmly believed was the Revelation of God. His true greatness lies in the fact that he did not think it proper to speak in his own name.

In strict accordance with his comprehensive and synthetic spirit, Shankara established a new kind of worship in India. In his time there were a number of important sects in India, the chief among them being the Pashupatas, the Bhagavatas, the Sauras, the Shaktas and the Ganapatyas. Some of these were mutually antagonistic, but Shankara tried to unify them all in an all-comprehensive faith. He instituted a form of worship in which Shiva, Vishnu, Surya, Kali and Ganapati are worshipped together, and the commonest temples in India are those in which these are worshipped.

The crown of the teaching of Shankara lay in what he called the Advaita Vedanta. This was the core of his Gospel or the Gospel proper. This was the light of all his seeing. He had received this as his earliest inheritance from his Guru or Teacher, who had received it in his turn from his Guru, Gaudapada. Shankara developed this, however, into a most remarkable self-consistent system of philosophy, the like of which had never been seen before in India. It is doubtful if there has been known anything like it anywhere else. This philosophy is deep and profound and one of the greatest achievements of the Human Intellect. Shankara, besides, buttressed it with Scriptural authority, making it thus an integral part of a vital religion.

The essence of Shankara's Gospel lies in his teaching that the Spirit is the only Reality, and that everything else in

comparison with it is unreal or illusory. He posits, thus, the World and the Jivas i. e. individual souls, in the sharpest of contrasts with the Spirit or the Absolute, and teaches the knowledge of this Spirit as the *Summum Bonum* of human life. It is an emphasis on Being against Becoming as the latter was believed in by the Buddhists and on Monism against Pluralism as it was taught by the Jainas. In strict accordance with this, the Way of Life taught by Shankara emphasized *Vairagya* i. e. non-attachment, and *Sannyasa*, renunciation, as the chief means to *Moksha*, the perfect release.

Shankara, however, was too big a man not to make room for the World and the Jivas, relative and precarious as it was, in his teaching. While being profoundly intellectual, he was a mystic too, and consequently he gave some place in religious life to Works and Bhakti. It was this which gave plausibility to his system and made it current coin. Those who followed him emphasized its extreme aspects and preached what was something very near Intellectual Nihilism. This system came to be known in course of time as Mayavada, the doctrine of Maya i. e. Illusion, the negative aspects of Shankara's philosophy looming large. Of course the founder of the system was responsible for this to some extent, inasmuch as the ethical, the emotional and the aesthetical values of life had almost evaporated in the white heat of his intellectual genius. It was but natural, therefore, that his system came to be known as *Shushka Vedanta*, dry Vedanta, and it made much of the human life an arid waste. Under this form the system became even antinomian, and many people, both Sannyasis and laymen, gave free vent to their passions and lower impulses, thinking themselves to be Brahman and as such to be above all law. It is easy to abuse such a system and it is no wonder if there were serious abuses in its wake.

It is significant that this system has found its protagonists chiefly among the Brahmins and the intellectual classes of India.

This too was a direct heritage from Shankara. He kept the *Varnashrama-Dharma*, the caste-system, intact, or rather he reconstructed it in its present form with the Brahmins at the top. It is true the Sannyasi was, according to him, superior to the Brahmin, but here again only the latter can take sannyasa. Social conservatism and even reaction came thus to be allied with Shankara's system from early times, and the so-called religious, social and political leaders of the society found the profession of Shankara Vedanta easy to make. Even the sceptics took shelter under it and calling themselves Vedantins posed as men superior to all religion. Under its cover they patronised various religions and even God Himself, for even He was, according to them, a product of one's imagination. These men played fast and loose with all religious terminology, and the individual being became or was the cosmic being with them. The line of demarcation between them, if there was any, was to them extremely thin, making it easy for them to pass from the one to the other.

In our own time this system of philosophy has been made popular and even fashionable by Swami Vivekananda, who preached it first in the U. S. A., as a gospel that he said he had inherited from his Master Ramkrishna Paramhansa. A close study of the teachings of the latter, however, shows him to be at least as much a Shakta and a Bhagavata as a Vedantin of Shankara's School. The present writer mentioned this to a leading Swami of the Ramkrishna-Vivekananda Mission, and the only answer he gave was that Ramkrishna taught Bhakti-Marga to the ordinary people publicly while reserving the knowledge of the Vedanta for an inner circle of his disciples whom he wanted to be Sannyasis. This was no explanation, for apart from other things it was certainly far from the mind of Ramkrishna to divide his teaching into two such parts as esoteric and exoteric knowledge. The answer carried with it, besides, severe criticism of the Mission itself, which not only teaches but broadcasts the Vedanta to all and sundry, without any regard for one's spiritual fitness to receive it.



Swami Vivekananda's Vedanta has allied itself easily with the religious nationalism of the Hindus, and one of its results has been the intensification of the religious, racial and national pride of the Aryan people of this land. To say that it is a sin to call a human being a sinner and that we are divinities or God Himself as Vivekananda said at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago in the year 1893 A. D., cuts at the root of all humility and real religion. Such teaching, besides, becomes exceedingly dangerous when a whole nation, under the influence of adverse political circumstances, is apt to think of it as the most distinguishing feature and the chief glory of its religion. It is doubtful, besides, if Vivekananda may be said to be a correct interpreter of the Shankara Vedanta. In all likelihood Swami Ram Tirtha was much nearer to the spirit of Shankara.

As has been said above, the chief value of Shankara's work lay in his re-establishing the Vedic Dharma throughout the land as against Jainism and Buddhism, and in teaching a more spiritual religion as against the Karma-Kandis. He laid the foundations of something higher, which came in the fulness of time. It is very significant that Shankara's name as an Acharya has been associated with Ramanuja, Madhva etc.. It was the sound instinct of the popular as well as the cultured mind of India which was at the root of this association. It is also significant that for over a thousand years which have passed since Shankara's time, there has not been one man belonging to his school of thought, of sufficient eminence, to have his name coupled with Shankara's as these have been. The positive elements of Shankara's teaching and work were incorporated by these later Acharyas in their systems, and they gave to India a religion which is not only full and rich, but which is one of the greatest glories of the entire religious world.

The work of these later Acharyas lay in the development and perfection of what is known as the Bhagavata-Dharma. The



beginnings of this religion so far as India is concerned are enshrouded in a kind of obscurity, but they may well be traced to the Vedic as well as to the Dravidian sources. It is said in the Padma Purana that Bhakti had its origin in South India in the land of the Dravidas. Perhaps the author of this Purana never thought of attributing it to the Dravidians as a race, but there is no doubt that they had much to do with the origin as well as the development of Bhakti in India. The Aryans as a race have been too conscious of their superiority to other peoples on account of their fair skin to have that humility which is of the essence of Bhakti. The present writer came to realize this more than ever when he read the Negro Spirituals and heard the singing of these by the Negroes in some of the southern States of the U. S. A. Christianity is pre-eminently a religion of Bhakti, one of the noblest forms of the Bhagavata Dharma, taking the term in the sense of a religion of love and devotion to God. The Aryan people of the Western world, however, have never been able to realize this religion in their life and practice fully. They have been too intellectual and colour-conscious to do this. It is noteworthy that among the Europeans, the Latins have realized Bhakti to a larger extent than the Teutons, and that they are comparatively less colour-conscious. As for the Negroes they have been gifted with a vein of deep emotion, and their particular sufferings at the hands of the white people in the U. S. A., have helped remarkably in the growth of Bhakti in them. This devotion of theirs has manifested itself in the songs known as the Negro Spirituals, which constitute a new edition of the Christianity of the first days. There is nothing like these songs in all the devotional literature of the Christian world. They have come out straight from the broken heart of a crucified people. Something similar to this took place in India many centuries ago.

The origin of the Bhagavata-Dharma is usually traced to the Mahabharata in general and the Bhagawad-Gita in particular. It may be said to go further back in the past, for one can see elements of it in the Upanishads and even in the Vedas. It lies in these

in a seed-form, and it is indeed far from what we know as Bhakti. This term makes its appearance for the first time in Svetasvatara Upanishad where it is used only once. We must note here the fact that this Upanishad itself is not one of the earliest. The absence of the term does not mean, however, that the thing itself was not there. A good deal of the popular religion among the Aryans in the Vedic and the Upanishadic times never found expression in the Scriptures of the early days. But it was in this that the spirit of Bhakti, which means deep faith in and love for God or gods, predominated. Even the Vedic Hymns are not altogether lacking in this element. It could not but be so, for human beings are so made by God that they are bound to feel their dependence on Him in one form or another. Very likely this popular religion of the Vedic Aryans assimilated to itself some of the elements of the non-Aryan religion prevailing in the north-west of India in their time. We now know from the finds of Mohen-jo-Daro and Harappa that this latter religion was Dravidian and that it was rich in emotion. As such it supplied the deficiency in the mental and spiritual constitution of the Aryan people. This popular religion was given a classic form in course of time and it came to be associated with the name of Vasudeva and Sri Krishna. The first full-orbed expression of this is found in the Bhagawad-Gita, and we might add that the whole of the Mahabharata was re-cast in its present form to give this faith as wide a currency as possible.

The existence of this Bhagavata Dharma in an organized form has been testified to by indubitable witness dating from a period earlier than 200 B. C. It made disciples of even non-Indians showing thus its universal character. One of these was Heliodorus who had come to India as an ambassador of Antelikedis, a Prince of the Greeks, to the court of Bhagabhadra, a son of Kotsi, the Prince of Takshasila. Heliodorus called himself a Bhagavata and raised a pillar bearing an eagle for the glorification of "this new religion." An earlier mention of this religion has been made by Megasthenes, who came as an ambassador to the court of Chandragupta of the

Maurya dynasty in about 320 B. C. He speaks of the worship of "Heracles" by a people called Saur seni, and of "Methera" as one of their principal cities. This Heracles is now identified with Sri Krishna, the Saur seni tribe with the Shurasen Kshatriyas and Methera with Mathura by most of the scholars.

These and other testimonies make it clear that the Bhagavata Dharma was prevalent in India in the fourth century B. C., and that it made disciples of people belonging to foreign lands. Evidently it had at this early period crossed the boundaries of Race and Nationality, manifesting itself thus as a universal religion.

The chief gospel of this faith at this early period was the Bhagawad-Gita, which book is spoken of in the Mahabharata a number of times as a great Scripture. This shows that the book was in existence before the last recension of the great Epic was made. From the internal evidence offered by the Gita itself, we can say that it could not have been written later than 500 B. C. It is certainly later than the older Upanishads and much earlier than such Upanishads as the Maha-Narayana, Maitrayana etc. The Gita quotes Katha, Mundaka and Svetasvatara, which belong to a period later than that of the Chhandogya and the Brihadaranyaka. The interval between these smaller Upanishads and the Gita does not seem to have been a long one. In the Mahabharata the Gita is described again and again as a unique piece of religious literature, and long before Shankara appeared it must have been looked upon as a Scripture of the first rank, almost if not altogether. It was, however, Shankara, who completed this tradition in regard to the book, including it in what is known as the Prasthanatraya, the three-fold Scriptures. He wrote a commentary on it along with those on the classical Upanishads and the Brahma-Sutras. This was the first of scores of commentaries that have followed since his time on the Gita.

The God worshipped by this Bhagavata-Dharma was at first known as Vasudeva. We come across this name for the first time in the Mahabharata, where it is clearly used as a name for the Deity, just as Narayana, Hari etc., are used. The same name is used in the Epic for Krishna as well. It has been suggested by some scholars that both these names were at first independent of each other. The term Vasudeva was used for God, but it was also the name of a great Kshatriya teacher who was no other than Sri Krishna. In course of time, however, both these names coalesced in one. Other scholars are of the opinion that the name Vasudeva was originally that of a great teacher who taught first the Bhakti-Marga, and that in course of time he came to be identified with the very God whose worship he taught. The first manifestation of this identification is found in the Gita, and quite a large part of Vaishnavism has held this belief ever since. One wonders, however, if the influence of Jainism and Buddhism, both of which religions recognised their great teachers as Perfect Beings, had anything to do with the development of the belief in Incarnation of God at that time. Whatever it be, the Bhagavata-Dharma ran parallel to these non-Vedic religions, and from early days it had a fairly good share of the popular faith in India.

Another form of the Bhagavata-Dharma came to be evolved a little later than the one found in the Gita. This is known as the Pancharatra-Dharma. Mention of it is made for the first time in the Narayaniya Akhyana of the Mahabharata. This Akhyana quotes from the Gita more than once, which clearly shows that it is later than the Celestial Song. It also quotes Patanjali, which brings down its date to some time after 200 B. C. Several scholars are of the opinion that it may have been written about the beginning of the Christian era.

One of the most notable features of this Pancharatra Dharma is the preference it gives to the term Narayana for God over that of Vasudeva, though this latter word is used often as



synonymous with Narayana. The term Narayana is interpreted in several ways. The meaning given in the Akhyana itself is "He who is the Refuge or the Goal of Human Beings." The name itself is old for it has been used in the Satpatha Brahmana, which makes it even anterior to Vasudeva. Another important feature of this Pancharatra-Dharma is its belief in the Emanations of God, which are four in number, viz., Vasudeva, Sankarsana, Pradumna and Aniruddha.

The most important feature of this Akhyana is its teaching on Bhakti. It goes in this beyond the Gita without a doubt. This latter book is so full of action that it becomes impossible for it to move in the serene atmosphere found in some of the chapters of the Akhyana. In the Akhyana God is seen face to face as He is in His own Heaven surrounded and worshipped by His Saints. These are His devotees who adore and worship Him in the way He should be by all. He is attainable by all those who have single-minded devotion for Him.

In this book, the Holiness of God and of His Saints is emphasized perhaps more than anywhere else in all religious literature. The place where Narayana is found by Narada, His true devotee, is called Sveta-dwipa, the White Island, and those who live there are described thus:

"The people who inhabit this Island have no physical bodies, in consequence of which they have no desire for sensual objects. They are white i. e. full of Sattva-Guna. They are, besides, so shining that they can not be seen by those who are sinners. They themselves are sinless. Their heads resemble an umbrella and their limbs are divine. Their bones are like steel and there is no flesh in their bodies; they have the same attitude towards honour or insult. These men are in beauty like the moon or the sun. When some people from the earth went to the White Island, they found the light there as intense as it would be if a



thousand suns were shining at the same time. Because of this they were so dazzled that they could see nothing. They only heard God being praised, from which they thought that He had come to the assembly. Some spirit told them that God could not be seen without one's practising single-minded devotion for a long time. "

This Pancharatra Dharma seems to be the earliest name of what came to be known later as the Bhagavata-Dharma or Vaishnavism. In the Narayaniya Akhyana it is classified as one of the five great Ways of attaining the Final Beatitude. These are the Samkhya, the Yoga, the Aranyaka, the Pancharatra and the Pasupata. The Samkhya mentioned here is not the same as the System of Philosophy bearing that name. Evidently this last is developed later. The Samkhya of the Akhyana is more theistic and in all likelihood in it lies the origin of what later on came to be known as the Vedanta. The Pasupata is the way of devotion to Shiva corresponding to that of devotion to Narayana. The Aranyaka is the way shown by the great Upanishads. The Yoga is the same that has been associated with the name of Patanjali.

The Narayaniya Akhyana is in all probability the first of all the great books dealing exclusively with Bhakti that came to be written in course of time in India. Very significantly the teaching of Bhakti herein is put into the mouth of Narada, or rather this book shows how Narada, the ideal devotee of God, came to attain Bhakti. Another important thing to take note of in connection with this book is the mention of Forgiveness as one of the highest of God's attributes. It goes, besides, behind Krishna and Arjuna, and finds in Narayana and Nara the prototypes of both of them. The Akhyana is, besides, concerned more with Eschatology than Ethics, a matter in which it differs much from the Gita. The Heaven which it describes is free from all ideas of sex and even Laxmi, the consort of Narayana, is absent. The devotees are free from all flesh and fleshly

desire, and the Gospel that is meant to be preached through this vision of God and His devotees is undoubtedly other-worldly. In all these matters there is a definite attempt to go beyond the teaching of the Gita. It is worth noting that much of the Bhakti-Marga in India has followed the line of thought and life as pointed out by this Akhyana. Its great teachers have been Narada, Shandilya and the four Sanas, viz., Sanaka, Sananda, Sanatakumara and Sanatana, all of them being recognised as *Aveshavataras* i. e. inspired Prophets.

This Pancharatra Dharma had much vogue in many parts of India and especially in the south about the time of Shankara. Innumerable books called Pancharatra Samhitas have been known to exist, their number reaching the high figure of 215. Many of these may have been written in later times, but there was a large body of tradition of this Pancharatra Dharma at the time of Shankara. One of the great Acharyas of this Dharma was Yamunacharya, who passed away in the year 1040 A. D.

Ramanujacharya was a direct disciple of Yamunacharya and as such he inherited some of the best traditions of the Pancharatra Dharma. Being, besides, a great religious and philosophic genius, he made it the mission of his life to give a consistent and systematic form to these. His work was of so far-reaching a character that he succeeded in making Dravidian Vaishnavism almost a national religion. He grafted the Pancharatra Dharma on the tree of the Vedic Dharma as developed by Shankara. The latter had prepared the ground for him, and he made the best use of it. The positive elements of Shankara's work served as a sure foundation for the noble superstructure which he built thereupon. It is true a good part of his work was of the nature of a war against the teachings of Shankara, but looking at it from a larger perspective, we can not but come to the conclusion that Ramanuja was raised by Providence to develop and perfect the Vedic Dharma or Hinduism as it was left by his predecessor Shankara.

Ramanuja did this work by writing commentaries in the manner of Shankara on the Prasthantrayas, the three-fold scriptures. It is in his commentary on the Brahma-Sutras that he propounds his philosophy known as Vishistadvaita in strong opposition to Shankara's monism and gives Theism a firm Scriptural basis and systematic form. This commentary is known as Sri Bhashya and has come to attain a position almost equal to that of Shankara's commentary. Though lacking in the brilliancy and the originality of the latter, it is sounder in its doctrine and decidedly more true to the Scripture which it tries to interpret. Some of the most eminent scholars both of the East and the West, and especially those who are free from any theological or philosophical bias, have given clear testimony to this aspect of the commentary of Sri Ramanuja.

Much of the philosophical teaching of Ramanuja is directed against the Mayavada of Shankara. This was necessary in order to clear the ground for the propagation of the system of Theism he had found in the Scriptures. It may be that in about the three centuries that had elapsed since the time of Shankara, the Advaita taught by the latter had developed some of its nihilistic tendencies and that it had come to lose many of its redeeming features. Already a revolt against the Vedanta of Shankara had begun and it was felt by many that the great Acharya was more of a Buddhist than a Vedantin proper. Padma Purana says this in a most emphatic manner, and both Yamunacharya and Ramanuja say the same thing again and again. There was a tradition of Vedantic Theism which had come down from old times and been maintained by important persons, some of whom are mentioned by Ramanuja. Some one was needed, however, to give this tradition the form of a regular system of philosophy and theology, and it fell to the lot of Ramanuja to do this. In the words of Keith, the great English scholar, this work of Ramanuja "in substantial merit and completeness far outdid any previous effort to find in the Brahma Sutras a basis for Monotheism."

The greatness of Ramanuja's work will be appreciated still more when it is realized that he grafted on this Vedantic Theism the Pancharatra Dharma. He brought the two together and made of them a consistent whole. What is now known as Vaishnavism assumed through his efforts the character of a fully orthodox creed, and it is this which has become one of the leading traditions in medieval and modern Hinduism. He also incorporated into this Theism the Bhakti of the Dravida Saints. This last was not, however, Ramanuja's work. He had inherited it from his teacher Yamunacharya who, in his turn, had received it as a heritage from some of his predecessors.

This Bhakti-Marga of the Saints and especially the Dravida Saints deserves special mention. As has been said before, Bhakti has been, more or less, a special gift with the Dravidians, and it had an independent origin among them. It was because of this natural aptitude of theirs that Pancharatra Dharma had found congenial soil in the south and was flourishing there while it had disappeared to some extent in the north in the early centuries of the Christian Era. A number of Saints had appeared in the Dravid land known as Alvars, who had sung the praises of God with a love, devotion and fervour which were new in the religious history of India. It was a spontaneous creation, a New Dispensation of God among the Dravidians. Some chosen few among them had met God face to face without any intermediaries in the shape of Scriptures or Avataras, and they came to be known as Alvars. Among them there were some Shudras and even a woman which shows that their Bhakti had transcended the bounds of race, caste, class and sex. The Hymns composed by these Alvars run into thousands and bear on them the impress of a deep personal experience of God. Nathmuni, who was a disciple of the last of the Alvars and an able theologian, had arranged these in a systematic form. This collection came to be known as Tamil Prabandhanama and was looked upon with a veneration similar to what the Vedas had evoked. It was called by some the Tamil Veda and even the name Vedanta was given to it.



Ramānuja, who was the third in succession from Nathmuni, considered it a sacred mission of his life, entrusted to him by his teacher Yamunacharya, to integrate this Dravida Bhakti-Marga with the Pancharatra Dharma. He fulfilled this task with remarkable devotion and industry extending over a period of more than seventy five years. It would seem he was specially gifted by God to do this great work, for he lived an unusually long life of 120 years. During this period he brought together the three great streams of spiritual life and thought that were then current in India and made them flow together into one broad river to water the whole of Bharatakhanda therewith. The path of Bhakti that he thus built and paved has been the leading one in the history of Hinduism since his time, and it has been followed and broadened by innumerable Acharyas and Saints who came after him.

It is a remarkable testimony to the synthetic character of the work done by Ramanuja that some time after his passing away, his Sampradaya was divided into two branches, one called Vadagalai and the other Tengalai. The first of these is the northern one with its headquarters in Kanchi, while the second is the southern one with its chief seat in Sri Ranga. The Vadagalai school is fully orthodox believing in the Vedic Scriptures as the chief revelation of God, while the Tengalai school considers the Tamil Veda as the more important Scripture of God. These schools differ, besides, in their belief concerning Bhakti and the Grace of God in a manner which is characteristic not only of their own religious life but also of the Aryan and the Dravidian types of character. The former leaves something to the efforts of man in the attainment of salvation, whereas the latter attributes it wholly to God. The illustrations that they give to make this matter clear are drawn from Nature and are remarkable for their aptness. The first one compares the life of the devotee with the young one of a monkey, which sticks to its mother with its own effort and strength, whereas the second compares the devotee with the young one of a cat which is held by its mother.



Ramanuja's work in the propagation of the Bhakti-Marga has branched off in a manner similar to the one mentioned above on a much larger field, viz., the whole of Bharatavarsha. One of the first great Bhakta-Saints of Medieval India was Ramananda. He was in the line of direct spiritual succession from Ramanuja, but devotion to God and fellowship among God's believers became so paramount with him that he gave up some of the orthodox beliefs and practices, and came to look upon true Bhakti as a Revelation in itself. He was followed in this work of his by Kabir, Nanak and a host of others. On the other hand, Vaishnava Acharyas such as Nimbarka, Madhva, Vailabha etc., while founding their Sampradayas on the interpretation of the Prasthantrayas in a way slightly different from that of Ramanuja, have looked upon him as their great forerunner. Vaishnavism, whether in the South or in the North, Vedic or non-Vedic, has thus been largely indebted to Ramanuja.

According to Ramanuja, the world is real and so are all the individual souls. He goes a step further, saying that both Matter and Jivas i. e., individual souls, are eternal and co-eternal with God. They are dependent on Him serving His will and purpose, and are so intimately related to Him as to form a kind of body for Him. They may assume various forms, but that does not affect God in any way so as to make Him participate in their changes or imperfections. God in himself is the Perfect Person, possessing all the good and auspicious qualities that we can think of. He is, besides, the efficient cause of the evolution of the world and the Jivas. He is also the material cause, though in a restricted sense, and the final cause as well.

To Ramanuja there is only one Reality, one Absolute, but this Reality is qualified by Matter and Jivas. This is why he calls his system Vishistadvaita. Both nature and souls are God's modes, His body, which He governs and regulates without entering into their imperfections. These form His outer body if we may

call it such. God has, besides, an inner body, which is an integral part of His very Being.

According to Ramanuja God is the Perfect Person. He is the Spirit having as such the attributes of consciousness and knowledge. He is also full of joy. He has, thus, all the three well-known attributes—Sat, Chit and Ananda—inhering in Him as essential parts of His being. He has, besides, all the good qualities or attributes that we can think of. The chief among these are knowledge, love and power. It is by these that He creates or rather evolves the universe, and then manifesting Himself in person in course of time, either partly or wholly, draws to Himself in a special manner the souls made ready by their good actions and Bhakti for salvation.

It is not possible for us here to go through the details of the system of philosophy of Ramanuja in order to weigh it properly. We must rest content with saying that like every other system, it is not altogether free from defects. Some questions can never be answered finally by the human intellect. There is bound to remain something which is insoluble. Accordingly, the theory that there are an infinite number of souls bound up with God from eternity with all their *Karmas*, however much such souls may be dominated by God, does limit in some way the absoluteness of God. This is a weak point in Ramanuja's system, and the Acharyas who followed him tried to remedy this defect.

The next great Acharya who came on the field after Ramanuja was Nimbarka. He lived in the eleventh century and established a Sampradaya of his own. He called his system of philosophy *Dvaitadvaita*, which means Dualistic Monism. He does not look upon matter and souls as a body of God, but regards them as distinct independent realities, though dominated by God. Because of this domination they are said to be identical with God. His system is neither elaborated well, nor is it quite consistent. The special feature of his work does not lie in his philosophy so much as in

his giving Bhakti a new form. While Ramanuja preached Bhakti of the meditative and contemplative kind, he emphasized love and emotion more. Krishna and Radha were with him the main objects of worship.

Madhvacharya, who appeared in the thirteenth century, was an original thinker. He worked out a system of philosophy with some special features. Being, besides, a Vedic scholar, the only one of the kind among the Acharyas, he harked back to the Vedas and the Brahmanas. He also put special emphasis on the Mahabharata and the Bhagavata Purana as Scriptures. He thus widened the scope of the Scriptures, which was a new development of Hindu religious thought and life.

Madhva's philosophy is frankly dualistic and is known as *Dvaita*, Dualism, without any qualification. While directing his main attack against Shankara's Monism, he criticised severely the system of Ramanuja also. He recognised real and eternal distinctions between God and souls, God and matter, souls and matter, one soul and another, and atom and atom of matter. The difference between God and souls, according to him, is that God is independent while the latter are dependent on him. He goes thus to the other extreme from that of Shankara, a thing which required no small courage on his part, since such a position was a direct contradiction to innumerable texts of the Upanishads. He explained all such texts in accordance with his own theory just as Shankara had done before him. This is all the more interesting because Madhva had begun his religious life as a Sannyasin of one of the orders established by Shankara. The reaction that came upon him seems to have been due largely to his keen ethical sense. It was, perhaps, due to the same cause that he included in the canon of Scriptures the Mahabharata and the Bhagavata. An enlarged canon of this type gave him full scope for a proper synthesis of Karma, Jnana and Bhakti, which is a special feature of his thought. Bhakti, however, is the culmination of the other two

in his eyes. He had, besides, a profound sense of sin, and was fully convinced that no effort of man can save him. It is only the grace of God that can ultimately redeem souls. He believed in a kind of election of souls by God some being predetermined by Him for the Final Beatitude while others for hell for eternity. Coupled with this he showed a great missionary zeal and established a Sampradaya of much vital power. He believed that God could be approached only through a Mediator, who is no other than Vayu, the son of Vishnu who is God Himself. In many of his beliefs, some scholars see an influence, indirect or direct, of Christianity, but no definite evidence of this is available.

There is no doubt that Madhva was remarkable as a religious teacher. He worked with much success over a long period for the spread of his faith by means of preaching and writing. His profound scholarship, high intellectual power and originality of mind together with a single-minded devotion to God, attracted to him a large number of disciples, some of whom were men of powerful intellect and much strength of character. Even to-day he has a good following in the South, especially in Karnatic and Mysore, and some disciples in the North.

Vishnu Swami was another Acharya of the Bhakti Marga. His date is very uncertain, there being a number of conflicting accounts of the time when he lived. He is said to have exercised much personal influence on the great poet-saint Jnaneshvara of Maharashtra, the latter being his junior by thirty or forty years. Doubts are, however, expressed about this by scholars. Like all his predecessors mentioned above, he too belonged to the South. His system of philosophy is considered to be very like that of Madhva, and he is said to have written commentaries on the Gita, the Vedanta Sutras and the Bhagavata Purana. Practically none of his books are available to-day, and only a few followers of his are left, if at all. In all probability, among the Vaishnava Acharyas, he was the first to recognise Radha along with Krishna as an object of worship. He



lived probably earlier than Nimbarka. We have dealt with him last because of his alleged connection with Vallabha. There is a strong tradition in the church of the latter that he was in the direct line of spiritual succession from Vishnu Swami. No evidence for this, however, is found in Vallabha's own writings. The tradition has, nevertheless, persisted, and there may be some connection between the two. It is possible that Vallabha's own family belonged to the church of Vishnu Swami as is said by some of the followers of Vallabha. If this be not true, it may be that Vallabha was influenced to some extent in his early life by the teachings of Vishnu Swami. It may also be that he may have received a large accession of followers from the latter's church, which perhaps meant its absorption almost into the church of Vallabha. It has been suggested by a scholar of the church of Vallabha that the disciples of the latter may have invented this connection between their Church and that of Vishnuswami as a reply to the criticisms of their opponents that their Sampradaya had no definite succession. Whatever this be, there is no doubt that a belief in some kind of spiritual connection between the two Churches has persisted in remaining among the followers of Vallabha.

We have mentioned so far the four main Churches or Sampradayas of Bhakti in India, viz., those of Ramanuja, Nimbarka, Madhva and Vishnu Swami. It is these which have helped much in the development and propagation of the Bhagavata Dharma in the land. They have been followed by others, and the most notable of these latter are the Sampradayas of Vallabha and Sri Chaitanya. Even apart from all these Sampradayas, the Bhagavata Dharma has found wide currency in the country through the teaching of the Puranas in general, and the Ramayana, the Vishnu Purana and the Bhagavata in particular. Besides, a whole host of Saints and Bhaktas of all castes and classes from the highest to the very lowest, and of both sexes, arose in every province of this vast country, and they spread the religion of Bhakti in every nook and corner. A few of the most notable of these great persons are Jnaneshvara,



Namdeva, Tukaram, Ramdas etc. in Maharashtra; Narasimha Mehta, Mirabai etc. in the western part of India; Ramananda and Tulsidas in U. P.; Jayadeva and others in Bengal etc., etc. The names of some of these have been associated with *Panthas*, Paths, which were either established by them or arose spontaneously out of their work.

In addition to these we might mention another host of Saints and Bhaktas who are not altogether orthodox. The most prominent of these are Kabir, Dadu, Nanak and the Sikh Gurus who followed him. These also are teachers of the Bhakti-Marga, and they have done much to realize in their own life and propagate by their life and teachings the broader aspects of the Bhagavata Dharma. They liberalised both Hinduism and Islam, and worked out a kind of divine synthesis of the best elements of these religions in their life as well as teachings. This was a legitimate development of Hinduism in general and its Bhakti-Marga in particular. From early times the Hindus have believed that the highest truths of Religion are not a monopoly of any people or race, and that God does reveal Himself to all, without distinction of race or class or country. This particular development, moreover, was not something alien to Islam, for the Prophet Mohammed himself has said that every people and community has had its prophets inspired by God. The Sufis in India worked along the same line of synthesis from the Moslem end.

Later on after the British came to India there has been a further development of the broader aspects of the Bhagavata Dharma mentioned above. Hinduism, Islam and Christianity, the three great theistic religions of the world met together for the first time, and there arose among the Hindus prophetic men who saw the hidden agreement, harmony and concord that lay under the apparent conflicts among these religions. The two men who had the vision of this harmony and who worked for the realization of it in the national life of the country were Rajarshi Ram Mohan Roy and Brahmarshi Keshub Chunder Sen. They were true successors of Kabir and

Nanak. Another man of the same type was Rishi Mahadev Govind Ranade. He was a protagonist of the Bhagavata Dharma in what he called its 'Protestant' and liberal character, and worked for its spread under the new circumstances in the country. What he says about the achievements of the Bhagavata Dharma in Maharashtra alone is so true of the whole country that we may well quote it here. He says:

"We have thus noticed all the principal features of the religious movement, which, commencing with Dnyandev who lived in the fifteenth century, can be traced to the end of the last century as a steady growth in spiritual virtues. It gave us a literature of considerable value in the Vernacular language of the country. It modified the strictness of the old spirit of caste exclusiveness. It raised the *Sudra* classes to a position of spiritual power and social importance almost equal to that of the Brahmins. It gave sanctity to the family relations, and raised the status of women. It made the nation more humane, at the same time more prone to hold together by mutual toleration. It suggested and partly carried out a plan of reconciliation with the Mohammedans. It subordinated the importance of rites and ceremonies, and of pilgrimages and fasts, and of learning and contemplation, to the higher excellence of worship by means of Love and Faith. It checked the excesses of polytheism. It tended in all these ways to raise the nation generally to a higher level of capacity both of thought and action, and prepared it in a way no other nation in India was prepared to take the lead in re-establishing a united native power in the place of foreign domination. These appear to us to be the principal features of the religion of Maharashtra, which Saint Ramdas had in view when he advised Shivaji's son to follow in his father's footsteps, and propagate this Faith, at once tolerant and catholic, deeply spiritual and yet not iconoclastic."

What is said by Ranade with regard to the "Rise of the Maharatta Nation" here is also true of the rise of the Sikh

Nation as a result of the efforts of the Sikh Gurus. Sikhism was a manifestation of the Bhagavata Dharma special to the conditions in the Punjab at the time when it arose. Similar work has been done again in modern India by movements like the Brahma Samaj. This last was another phase of the Bhagavata Dharma as Ranade says, and under its inspiration Bengal had the leadership of the whole of India in its hands for nearly half a century. In religious, cultural and political life it supplied inspiration and guidance, and on the whole it has had a greater share in the making of New India than any other Province. Next to it stands Maharashtra which, in the persons of Ranade, Gokhale and Tilak, gave all-India leaders. These men, especially Ranade and Tilak, were influenced in the deepest springs of their life by the Bhagavata Dharma. Then again in the person of Mahatma Gandhi, who has led the whole of India during the last twenty years and has not only given it a new life but added much to its moral stature, we see the working of the Bhagavata Dharma on a larger field. All these examples prove the thesis of Ranade quoted above.

We must mention here one more great Teacher of the Bhagavata Dharma who appeared at the start of the modern period in India. He is Sri Swami Narayana. His life and work are so significant that he is spoken of by Mahadev Govind Ranade as the last of the great Acharyas. His own followers look upon him even as an *Avatara* of God and some of them go to the length of thinking of him as the *Avataree* of all *Avataras*, as greater than Rama and Krishna. Whatever this be, in him we find a personality of extraordinary vitality and charm, and he created a religious movement within the bounds of Vedic orthodoxy of a most remarkable type. It seems as if at the very time when the people of this land were passing for ever from the ancient and medieval Aryavarta to a new world, God summed up all that was best in the past and manifested it before India and the world for them to know what it was like. In it the

Bhagavata Dharma appeared once more in one of its purest and noblest forms.

In the foregoing few pages we have mentioned a number of movements of the Bhagavata Dharma which appeared after Vallabha. Some of these are orthodox i. e. strictly Vedic, some semi-orthodox and a few are openly non-Vedic. These last are, nevertheless, movements of pure Bhakti and as such they represent the Bhagavata Dharma in its larger and broader aspects.

As for Vallabha's movement, it needs no saying even that it is strictly Vedic and orthodox in its character. This is not all. Vallabha has been canonised as an Acharya by the entire Hindu religious consciousness, and as such his place is by the side of the four great Acharyas of the Vaishnava Sampradayas, viz., Ramanuja, Vishnu Swami, Nimbarka and Madhva.

## CHAPTER II

### **Brahmavada or Pure Theism**

It was in succession to the four main theistic Acharyas mentioned in the foregoing chapter that Vallabha appeared to spread the Gospel of the Bhagavata Dharma in the sixteenth century. From the very start of his career he put himself along with the Vaishnava teachers as against Shankara, whose teaching, characterised by him as Mayavada, was attacked by him as false and misleading. In the course of the three pilgrimages that he made all round India, he is said to have come across many followers of Shankara, with whom he had controversies almost constantly. From the reports that are given, it appears as if this were his only mission at the time. His work, however, was not of a negative character. If he refuted the teachings of Shankara, it was only with a view to establish a more positive doctrine which he had come to speak of as Brahmavada. The fact that Shankara's system had come to be known as Mayavada shows how its negative aspects had been emphasized by his own followers with results disastrous to all true religion and ethics. The positive character of Vallabha's teaching is brought out very well in the very name Brahmavada which he gave to his system of thought. It was indeed a stroke of genius on his part to have given it this name and to put it thus in sharp antagonism to the Mayavada of Shankara.

Vallabha differed, besides, in several important respects as regards his philosophical position from the theistic interpreters of the Vedanta such as Ramanuja, Nimbarka, Madhva etc. Because of



this he thought it necessary to work out a system of his own in accordance with the teachings of the Scriptures. Besides, this system was meant to serve as a philosophical background for the propagation of the special form of the Bhakti Marga, which it had been his chief mission to establish. He expounded this system in his *Anu Bhashya*, his commentary on the Brahma Sutras. He called it also *Shuddhadvaita*, Pure Monism as against Shankara's seeming Monism and Ramanuja's qualified Monism. The beauty and strength of his system lie in this that while it is at least as consistent as that of Shankara or for that matter any Monism in the world, it gives us a real world and a true fellowship with God.

God is, according to Vallabha, the Absolute, the Perfect Person, the *Purushottama*. He is *Sacchidananda*, the Absolute Being, Knowledge and Joy. He is the ground and root of all the souls and of the material world, and all these derive their being from Him. He is infinite and eternal, omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent, and has, besides, all the good and auspicious attributes. He has in Him attributes which look to us contradictory to one another, but this is not due to any kind of imperfection in His Nature. The attributes look such to us, only because our limited reason is not able to understand their perfect harmony in Him. In spite of all these infinite and apparently contradictory attributes, God is perfectly simple. These attributes of His are only so many facets of existence visible from different view-points. They are fused together in perfect unity so far as He Himself is concerned. As attributes they are only forms of the Absolute Reality apparent to us from the view-point of our analytic intellect. God is spoken of as *Viruddha Dharmashraya*, the substratum of contradictory qualities.

God is Real and there is no other Reality besides Him. He is the only Being and there is no non-Being besides Him. According to Vallabha, there is no room for such a thing or no-thing as Maya as introduced by Shankara for the explanation

of the world, for it is something alien to God. Nor can there be any creation out of nothing as believed in by the Jews and the Christians. The theistic Acharyas were wrong from his point of view because they posit something besides God to make the world possible. There is no other Real besides the Real, no non-Being besides the Being.

Because of this, God is the efficient as well as the material cause of the Universe. All things take their rise from Him and thus participate in His Being. This, however, is done in degrees. The matter out of which the world is made is the manifestation of the *Sat* aspect, the principle of life and existence in God, without the *Chit*, i. e. the consciousness and *Ananda*, i. e., the bliss aspects of His Being. God delights in self-manifestation and in the very act of such manifestation He imposes limits on Himself. This is His *Lila*, His sport, and He enjoys Himself in it. If one were to say that such self-limitation involves God necessarily in pain etc., Vallabha flatly denies it saying that under no circumstances God's Personality is affected by anything that He does. This is a mystery which, according to him, our intellect is not qualified to solve. The wonder of it is that all that God creates makes Him neither less nor more by an atom. Vallabha goes so far as to say that everything that we see is a kind of *avatara*, incarnation of God; he calls it a *swarupa-dharma*, a special form of God's Being. Since God is the First Cause and the Only Cause, everything partakes of, nay, is His Being in one form or another. The effect is bound to be like the cause, or rather it is the cause itself in another form. We must not, however, forget that such self-concealment of God is only the *Lila* of God performed for a definite purpose.

The material world, called *Jagata*, by Vallabha, being God Himself in a limited form, is a theatre for another *Lila* of a higher order. After having created the world God generates from Himself the *Jivas*, the souls. These participate in His Being to a

larger extent than Nature since they have in themselves two of His chief attributes, *Sat* and *Chit*, existence and consciousness. It is only the *Ananda*, Bliss, that they are lacking. The Jivas are not spoken of by Vallabha as effects. They are *amshas*, parts of God, and as such they are neither caused, nor created. They issue from Him spontaneously as sparks fly from fire, a metaphor given in the Upanishads. These souls are always in God either implicitly or explicitly. They are from all eternity because it is said in the Vedas that before creation had taken place, God desired to be many. They are spiritual beings and as such are above time and space. A soul, however, is atomic in size and resides only in one part of the body, but it pervades the entire body by its intelligence just as a lamp, though confined only to a part of a room, illuminates the whole of it. The soul is minute in size when it lacks the *Ananda*, but when this latter manifests itself in it, it becomes all-pervading.

The souls are in a fallen state in as much as they do not possess the attribute of *Ananda*, which is the most important quality of God. Their separation from God created in them a forgetfulness of their original and true nature, because of which they get involved in what is called by Vallabha *Samsara* as distinguished from *Jagata*, the objective world. The *Samsara*, according to him, is a product of the soul's imagination and action, which play round its I-ness and Mine-ness. This is the true Maya, a creation of soul's selfishness. Because of its selfishness, the soul puts itself in wrong relations with other souls and with the material world. It creates a web of its own and tries to lose itself in it. This is an illusion, for the web has no reality. According to Vallabha, it is this *Samsara*, the world of false relations created by the soul, which alone is Maya. It rises because the soul, which is absolutely nothing apart from God, tries to set itself up as an independent reality in its own right. Thus the very self, which would be something apart from God, is illusory: its body is illusory, and its world also is illusory. All this is *Samsara* and it is very different from the world of Nature. The

latter, known as *Jagata*, is not illusory, but is real, nay, is God Himself in one form.

It is not possible for the soul under the condition of its fall to know God of its own accord. This is why God Himself takes the lead in bringing it back to Himself. He does this at first by revealing His word in the Scriptures. There is a kind of evolution in this Self-revelation of God to the soul. Its first step is the *Karma-Kanda*, the ritualistic works enjoined by the Scriptures. In the beginning the soul performs these duties in a partially selfish spirit. Its *Sakama Karmas*, i.e., works done with a desire to attain some reward for one's self, do not bring it real happiness. It then learns to do these works in a *Nishkama*, i. e. unattached manner. This purifies it from its own selfishness and it becomes fitted to receive *Jnana*, knowledge. Attaining this it becomes united with and even absorbed in God in His *Akshara* form. This last is not, however, the supreme form of God.

This path of *Karma-Kanda* is extremely hard, even impossible to follow in the present Kali Yuga, the dark age. Because of this, God has shown out of His infinite mercy to the souls a way much easier to follow. This way is, besides, such as leads us to Him in His fulness.

The perfect and the highest form of God is no other than Sri Krishna. He is God in His fulness. He has all the attributes of *Brahma* in Him and as such He is the Absolute. He is also the *Bhagavana*, the Perfect God, Who has all the auspicious attributes in Him, and who is related to the world. As such He is the efficient, material and final cause of the world. Among His attributes the most important ones are six in number: viz., *aishwarya*, glory: *virya*, power: *yasas* good repute: *shrae*, power to attract others to Himself: *jnana*, knowledge: and *vairagya*, detachment from the world. Sri Krishna is also the *Akshara*, who is no other than Brahman, though there is some difference between the two. *Akshara* has the



all-pervading character of Brahman, but it is less than the latter in its *Anand*, bliss. It is a derived form of Brahman. It is also called *Brihata*, the great, by Vallabha. It is also spoken of as the Abode of God.

All that has been written here of Krishna does not describe Him fully. He is Himself. He is the *Ananda-form* of God, which, to Vallabha, is the essence of God. He is fully Himself in His *Ananda*, the other two chief qualities of his, viz., *Sat*, existence, and *Chit*, consciousness, serving only as a foundation for this Bliss of His. God is spoken of as *Rasa*, which includes the idea of realization of this joy as something objective.

This *Ananda-Swarupa*, Bliss-form of God, which is Krishna, is dynamic. God in this form of His wants to communicate Himself to others, to share His own *Rasa* with others. This is His supreme *Lila*, sport. He does this by appearing in human form, i. e., He incarnates Himself as a human being. In this form of His He has a body which has no material elements or qualities. It is entirely free from what are known as *Tāmas*, unconscious materiality, and *Rajas*, passion. It is, nevertheless, a body which can be touched, felt, seen, smelt etc. The perfect incarnation of Krishna, the Para Brahman, was the one known as Sri Krishna. He appeared in this form only during the period of his childhood and early boyhood, after which the Divinity was no more seen in His perfection. The body in this incarnation was pure *Sacchidanandatmaka*, i. e. of the qualities which Brahman Himself has. It was a manifestation of God who is the absolute Joy and Beauty on the physical plane, but without sharing any of the qualities of the latter. Not only is this Krishna, known as Bala Krishna, altogether divine, but everything connected with Him including the forests and the trees, the river Yamuna and everything in Vraja-land where He passed His life, was wholly divine. His incarnation in Vrandavana etc, was the enacting of the divine drama of God's own inmost life on the human plane. Everything connected with it was divine, altogether



divine, and though the *Lila* of God in this form is expressed in terms of human life and experience, there is no human element in it, much less anything like lust or sin.

This *Lila* of God, who is Sri Krishna, can be understood and experienced only by those who are gifted with faith and Bhakti. To the sensual or even the merely intellectual man, its true meaning is hidden, and he is apt to misunderstand it. One must have a special mind and body and soul, made of the joy-element of the Being of God Himself, to enter His *Lila* and to become an active participant in it. In order to do this, the first necessary step is to divest oneself of all that is sensual and selfish in one's own life. This *Lila* is altogether super-sensual, supernatural and divine, and it can be appreciated and realized only on that plane.

The purpose of this *Lila*, this Divine Drama, is to add to itself those souls who are elected by God from all eternity for this supreme experience, which is the Final Beatitude. God wants to share His Joy with others, it being His very nature to do so. He is Love Itself and as such can not but share Himself with others. In order to do this, He becomes even the least of the least, hiding all His power and wisdom. The glory of His *Avatara* as Bala-Krishna lies in this that He shows Himself small and weak, putting Himself, thus, on a level with the commonest child or boy. In other Avatars, God's power and wisdom manifest themselves, which is true even of Krishna as he was in Mathura and Dwarka. But his life in Gokula and Vrandavana is the manifestation of His Love in its fullest form, wherein lies its perfect character.

This is the teaching of Vallabha in regard to the Incarnation of God as Bala-Krishna. He is differentiated from other Incarnations by being called not an *Avatara* but the *Avataree*, meaning one who is Himself in His fulness. The term implies that the

other *Avataras* were partial manifestations or God in limited forms. This teaching is based on the Bhagavata Purana and it constituted for him the supreme Gospel, which it was his special mission to preach to the world.

It is worth noting that this teaching was given at the same time by Sri Chaitanya in Bengal. While he differed in his philosophy from Vallabha, his system being known as *Achintya Bhedabhedā*, Incomprehensible Unity in Duality, his spiritual teaching was the same as that of his senior contemporary. There is one difference, however, between them in this matter. In Chaitanya's teaching Radha plays a part almost as important as that of Sri Krishna. In fact, according to him and his followers, Radha is the complementary form of Sri Krishna, Who is not Himself fully without this divine counterpart of His. Chaitanya's followers have developed this doctrine concerning Radha and Krishna in regard to their Master, who is to them the incarnation of both of them together. Their teaching is given as follows by the late Bepin Chandra Pal in an article as follows:

"Sri Bhagawana is the source and satisfaction, both the norm and the form, of all the emotions. Whatever is not in Him can not possibly be in this world. All these relations of love have their perfect form and fulfilment in the Being of Lord. This is why these are spiritual relations and not merely a movement of carnal affections that are to-day and cease to be to-morrow. And to realize Himself as *Nikhil-rasamrita-murti*, the Eternal Embodiment of all Rasas, the Absolute separates Himself from Himself, and by this eternal act of self-differentiation, creates within His own Being those vehicles and instruments of His *rasa*. This, in brief, is the philosophy of what the Vaishnavas call Vrandavana Lila, or the sport of Sri Krishna in Sri Vrandavana. But in this Vrandavana Lila, something was left unfulfilled. Sri Krishna, who excels in every quality, could not excel Sri Radha in the quality of her love. She left him a debtor. It was to discharge that

debt, to feel the supreme love of Sri Radha in his own self, that Sri Krishna assumed the form and spirit of Sri Radha in Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. This was the inner need of the Chaitanya *Avatara*."

In his teaching concerning Radha, Sri Chaitanya and his followers have evidently gone beyond the Bhagavata, since in this Purana Radha finds no mention. Vallabha, on the other hand, confines himself strictly to the letter of the Bhagavata, and consequently rarely, if ever, mentions her. The practical effects of the teaching of these great teachers have varied definitely in the thought and life of the movements founded by them. In the Church of Sri Chaitanya, what is called *Madhurya*, i. e. the emotion of love and devotion of the beloved towards her lover, has played a central part, while in that of Vallabha, although *Sringara* is considered to be the most important of all the *rasas*, it does not hold the same place. This *Sringara*, be it said here, is not the ordinary sex-love as is signified by the term, but its ideal and divine form wherein there is no lust or *Kama*. It is love in its purest form.

In the foregoing we have given the barest outline of the philosophy and theology of Vallabha. His system of philosophy is based on the Brahma-Sutras, which he supplemented, so far as his conception of God is concerned, from the teachings of the Bhagavata. As has been already said, Vallabha's Brahmavada is not an independent system of philosophy in the sense in which we understand that term as applied to the thought of Plato, or Aristotle, or Kant, or Hegel, or Spinoza. Vallabha was purely a religious teacher who thought it blasphemous to go beyond the letter of the scriptures. He was in this matter, along with Shankara, Ramanuja etc., like Thomas Aquinas and other Schoolmen of the Roman Catholic Church. His philosophy was meant but to serve as a background for the Way of Life and Salvation, which it was his mission to preach. The remarkable thing in

view of this is that he, along with the preceding Acharyas, succeeded so well in creating a system of thought which is highly coherent and consistent.

It may well be asked now if Vallabha has produced a system that is more consistent than others with the teaching of the Vedanta-Sutras. Judged from this point of view, his Brahmavada satisfies this requirement to a larger extent than the philosophical systems of other Acharyas. In regard to this matter, it will not be out of place here to quote two or three witnesses. The testimony of these is all the more important since they are not the followers of Vallabha. The Brahmavada of Vallabha was formulated mainly in antagonism to the Mayavada of Shankara. Accordingly we must see on whose side the weight of Scriptural authority lies. It is now almost a well-established fact of Hindu scriptural scholarship that there is an advance in thought in both the Vedanta Sutras and the Bhagawad Gita over the Upanishads, and that this lies in the direction of Theism. Many scholars, besides, admit that Shankara, while commenting on the Sutras, tried to create a consistent philosophical system out of the Upanishads rather than from the Sutras proper. In regard to this matter, we make room for the following comment from Mr. Rangacharya:

“ That the aim of Shankaracharya was to try to evolve what he himself took to be the teachings of the Upanishads out of the Vedanta Sutras of Badrayana—that is, he put into the Sutras what he himself understood to be the teaching of the Upanishads.

Now as regards the Upanishads themselves, it is doubtful if they teach the Mayavada of Shankara. Innumerable religious teachers and scholars of note, both of the East and the West, have denied this emphatically, and an independent reading of the Upanishads themselves would convince one of this. One

of these scholars, Colonel Jacob, while replying to Gough, says the following:

“ The writers of the older Upanishads i. e. the Vedantists of the older school were undoubtedly Parinamavadis or believers in the world of perception, and with them Brahma was not its substrate or illusory material cause, but the material from which the universe was evolved as the web of a spider etc.”

This testimony is confirmed by no less a person than the late Dr. Sir Ramkrishna Bhandarkar, one of the greatest Sanskrit scholars of our time. This is what he says:

“ The opinion expressed by some eminent scholars that the burden of Upanishadic teaching is the illusive character of the world and the reality of the one soul only, is manifestly wrong, and I may even say, is indicative of an uncritical judgement.”

Dr. Bhandarkar's testimony is all the more valuable because, though a Hindu of Hindus, he was free from the belief in the infallibility of the Hindu Scriptures. He was a devoted member and leader of the Prarthana Samaj, a body which, as an integral part of the Brahma Samaj, did not acknowledge the infallibility of any Scriptures. Because of this he was free to judge the teachings of the Scriptures impartially, free from any prepossession or prejudice.

We have so far cited the opinions of these scholars to show that Shankara's Mayavada was not the truest interpretation of the Vedānta Sūtras. They also show that it is doubtful whether Shankara represents correctly the meaning of the oldest Upanishads. We might now see whether among the Theistic Acharyas themselves, Vallabha is more faithful to the Scriptures than others. To this question Dr. Bhandarkar gives the following answer:



“Thus most of these (Vaishrava) schools avoid the Pantheism of Spinoza, and the incompatibility between God's development into the world and His transcendency by holding that the rudiments of the material and the spiritual world associated with God as His characteristics or as His body or as His power. only undergo development, He Himself remaining pure. Vishnu Swami and Vallabha, admitting as they do the development of Purushottama into the world and at the same time His transcendency, follow Badrayana.”

This testimony, positive as it is on behalf of Vallabha being a truer interpreter of the Vedanta Sutras than either Ramanuja, or Madhva, or Nimbarka, is all the more valuable because, so far as we know, Dr. Bhandarkar accepted the position of the English philosopher Dr. James Martineau, who was nearer to Ramanuja than to Vallabha in his thought.

One serious charge could be and as a matter of fact is brought against this Brahmavada of Vallabha, viz., that it is pantheistic and that as such it confounds God with the world. Of course even its worst critics can not say that it is that kind of Pantheism which identifies the world wholly with God and makes Him altogether immanent. Vallabha's belief and emphasis on the transcendence and personality of God are too evident to allow such misunderstanding to remain for a moment in any one's mind. His explanation of Nature or *Jagat* as the incarnation of the *Sad*-form, the Being aspect, and of souls or *Jivas* as that of His *Chit*-form, the aspect of Consciousness, of His total Personality, besides, prevents altogether the possibility of such a confusion. His Brahmavada is only a vestibule to his religious teaching which is wholly centred in God the Supreme Person, and whatever pantheistic elements there may be in his philosophy, they have never been introduced so far in the practical life of his followers. Besides, he clearly and emphatically warned his disciples against worshipping either Nature or Souls, as for example in the following verses in his *Sruti Gita*:

24 All Nature is Sat but God alone is worthy of worship. Nature is not at all worthy of this. The Reality of Nature not being worthy of worship, seekers of salvation should not worship it. In truth the Reality of Nature is due to Brahma (God), and so it is an illusion to believe in this Reality of Nature to the extent of regarding it as Brahma instead of worshipping Krishna. Therefore the *Jnanis* (those who know the Truth) should worship Sri Krishna who alone is the True and the Good.

25 Nature is a kind of flower that blooms in space (and then fades away), and as such it is transient. Now if Nature is transient, it does not follow that God is transient. God is the Basis of Nature and it is only by His power that Nature possesses whatever Reality there is in it. Because of this we should renounce the worship of Nature and worship constantly Sri Krishna who gives Reality to Nature.

26 The seeker of salvation should worship nothing that stands between Time and the least little piece of straw. God who is powerful to make us renounce our sins and who gives us the blessed qualities—He alone is worthy of worship: in other words none but God can make us free from sin.

27 God is hidden in souls: therefore they too are not to be worshipped in any way. Only we should have pity on them, but as for worship it is to be offered only to God.

28 He who would secure blessedness should worship God the eternally blessed one alone. He who would seek happiness in any other way than that of the worship of God finds nothing else but misery.

29 The joy of Sri Krishna is the highest: there is no other joy comparable to this. Even the Vedas are not able to describe this joy.

30 Just as the sea is pointed out by one's finger, so do we point out in short here all the meaning of this Revelation.

This is as emphatic as it could be. This is not, however, the only teaching of its kind given by Vallabha. All that he has written and done is so centred round Sri Krishna, who to him is God in His fulness and supreme form, that the worship of even gods has been eschewed by his followers. His worship of the one Absolute God, the Supreme Person, Sri Krishna, is of the jealous kind, and it can not tolerate the worship of any other Being, however great, beside Him. This is called *ananyashraya*, trust in any being or person other than God, and it has been counted as an evil and a sin.

## CHAPTER III

### Pusti Marga or The Way of Grace

The Way of Life and Salvation preached by Vallabhacharya is known as Pusti Marga. This is the most original part of his teaching, showing his religious genius at its best. It is the way of Bhakti Marga, the way of devotion taught by the Bhagawad-Gita, the Bhagavata and the Vaishnava Saints and Acharyas. It differs, however, in some important respects from the teaching of the preceding Acharyas, and has several distinguishing features of its own. The word *Pusti*, which means fatness or strength, is derived from the word *poshana* i. e. nourishment, used first by the Bhagavata with reference to God's grace. The idea underlying it is that the soul of man has become weak and lean owing to sin, and consequently it is in dire need of God's grace which alone can give it life and growth. It emphasizes thus the grace of God even more than Bhakti, which after all has its source in the heart of man. According to Vallabha, the origin, development and perfection of Bhakti, are dependent almost wholly, if not altogether, on God.

In order to understand the special teaching of Vallabha in this matter we must see what he has to say about the souls and how they advance in the path of God. The human souls, according to him, are of three kinds, viz, *Pusti* souls, *Maryada* souls and *Pravahika* souls. All these are different from one another in their origin, nature and final end. They all issue or are generated from

God, with their differences, which are from the beginning and which remain to the end. The first kind are the highest since they issue from the *anandakaya*, the Bliss-body of God. These souls are the *amsas* of this body, God being the *Amshi*, the whole, thereof. Their nature is such that they ultimately reach the highest goal of life, which is to have communion and fellowship with Sri Krishna, the Supreme God, in His divine abode. It is not impossible for them to fall a prey to sin and *samsara*, the world of I-ness and Mineness, but they have the divine seed, the *bija*, in them, which fructifies fully in the end. Being dependent wholly on the grace of God, they come to possess in course of time the truest of Bhakti, which is the means and the end in itself. These are in truth the souls of Grace.

The second kind of souls, i. e., the Maryada souls, are generated from the *Vach*, the Word, of God. Their strength or weakness lies in this that they are governed wholly by Law as distinguished from Grace. They are also called Vaidic souls, for they live and move and have their being in the revelation given in the Vedas. They delight in works prescribed by the Scriptures. They perform their ritualistic duties at first in an interested manner having in view some material good, whether in this world or in the next. They evolve from this state however, for they soon get dissatisfied by working in this manner, and begin to perform their ritualistic duties without any self-interest. This purifies their mind, and if they persist in this new path of theirs they might reach and be absorbed ultimately in the *Akshara*, which is a kind of vestibule to God's own abode. From here they may be translated higher into the Divine Household or the very heaven of God, but this needs a special grace. These souls are, however, essentially souls of Law.

The *Pravahika* souls rise from the *manas*, the mind, of God. They are souls neither of grace, nor of law, but of continuous motion or movement or drift which is the meaning of the



term *pravaha*. They live and move and have their being in their own self-will and in the world called *Samsara* or Maya, which is their own creation. At the end of the cycle they are re-absorbed in Avidya which is nescience. These souls are also called *asuri*, demoniac, and are sub-divided further into two groups, *Durjans*, wicked ones, and *Ajnas*, ignorant ones. The first of these are fully devilish by their very nature, whereas the latter have become so in course of time owing to association etc. There is hope for these latter.

The division of souls in these three major classes is no arbitrary act on the part of Vallabha, but is based on the teaching of the Scriptures, especially the Bhagawad-Gita. It is also worth noting that Vallabha seems to believe in election and predestination of souls to certain ends from the very start of their generation. He says God made them such and it is not for us to find fault with Him for whatever He may do. He is fully independent to do what He wills with whatever is His. In regard to this matter he says just the thing said by St. Paul centuries before him. Besides, in the *Lila* or the Divine Drama played by God on the theatre of this world, there is room for both evil and good: in fact the latter would not be there but for the former.

These three kinds of souls are divided further into sub-divisions and cross-divisions among themselves. In order to find these one does not need to go far, since one meets them at every turn. To begin from the top, we come across souls which belong to the pure and unmixed state of grace called *Shuddha Pusti*. These are wholly dependent on the grace of God, reserving nothing of their own strength or power. They have no desire for anything that is not God, however much it may be prized by other people. Even heaven they care not for, nor are they unhappy if it pleased God to put them into hell. In all things God's good pleasure is their aim and even in the worst of miseries and sorrows their minds are perfectly at rest because they know that whatever happens is for the best. In God's good world nothing is amiss for them. Their

love for God is altogether of the *nishkama*, disinterested kind and as such it is perfect.

Next to these are the souls which are in the state called *Pusti-Pusti*. They are different from the former in this that they do not give themselves up to God absolutely as the others do. Their life is full of grace, it is true, but there is still something lacking, due to which they do not reach the highest goal of life according to Vallabha. They become all-knowing in the end.

Then come the souls which have in them the state of both *Pusti* and *Maryada*. These belong to the realm of both Grace and Law. They rely on both Bhakti and Karma, owing to which they fall short of the highest state. They come to know in course of time the attributes of God, but they do not enjoy His fellowship.

Then come the souls which belong to the *Maryada-Pusti* class. They give up worldly activity and are devoted to *Dhyana*, contemplation of God. But since the grace of God is working in them, they have some elements of the highest Bhakti in them.

After these come the souls which belong to the *Pusti-Pravaha* class. Though the grace of God is working in them, they are given to religious works of all kinds such as pilgrimage etc.

Following these in the scale are those that belong to the *Pravaha-Pusti* class. They belong to the world even though they have come under the operation of God's active grace. Next to them come the souls of the *Maryada-Maryada* class. They give themselves up to religious deeds in order to go to heaven. These are followed by the souls of the *Maryada-Pravaha* class. They perform religious deeds and works with a view to attain the good things of this world.

Then come the souls that belong to the *Pravaha-Maryada* state. They are engrossed in works of all kinds.

The last class is that of *Pravaha-Pravaha* souls. They live altogether outside the working of Grace and Law, and are devilish, *asuric*, in their nature and activity.

Vallabha has given in this classification a description of the different kinds of souls as they are found in the world after they have come under the operation of Law or Grace or both, or have refused to come under the operation of any of these. In putting this description here we have anticipated much, which it now behoves us to see and understand.

The most important question that faces us now is to know how it is that these souls, which were originally divine, fell from their true nature. As we have said before, according to Vallabha, all the souls are *amsas*, parts of God, and they share with Him some of His great attributes, especially the six ones known as *aisvarya*, power and lordship; *virya*, prowess *yasha* good repute; *sri*, splendour: *jnana*, knowledge: and *vairagya*, detachment. With the disappearance of the *ananda*, joy of God, which is the first step in the generation of the souls, those qualities also disappear. The souls fall thus from their original estate and they now seek the *ananda* they have lost. They do this first in the outside world viz., *Jagat*, which, though objectively real and divine, is seen wrongly by them because of their selfishness, and is, therefore, turned into Samsara. The evil or the beginning of sin lies thus in selfishness on the part of the Jivas, *Ahamta* and *Mamata*, I-ness and mine-ness, being the root cause thereof. Hence everything goes wrong and they become more and more involved in this net of their own making. The souls stand in wrong relations with God with the consequence that they are false to themselves and to everything else. They live in a world of illusion created by their own selfishness, which is the only Maya that Vallabha knows of. This Maya, however, is very real in com-

parison with that of Shankara, for it is not merely the product of ignorance but of sin as well.

The separation of souls from God brings a forgetfulness, *vismriti* of God on their part. This in its turn makes them self-centred, thinking and working only for themselves. As a result thereof they get bound all round in a system of false relations seeing everything awry and making the entire web of life worse by their selfish interference. These are the steps which, according to Vallabha, souls take in their fall. In the last analysis, it is a spiritual fall, for its root lies in selfishness, *Ahamta* and *Mamata*, I-ness and Mine-ness.

One may well ask the question as to why it is that God caused this separation of souls from Himself with all its consequences. Vallabha gives a peculiar answer to this, viz., that it is God's wish, His sovereign pleasure. It is an integral part of His divine *lila*. In this Vallabha differs from most of the Hindu teachers, who are afraid to attribute the origin of man's fall and of moral and spiritual evil to God Himself in the last resort. According to them it means some kind of moral responsibility for this evil on His part, which takes away to some extent His infinite glory. This is why they attribute it to the souls' karmas etc. To Vallabha, however, any other cause of this kind would itself be a detraction from God's absolute independence. Here he is certainly more consistent.

As to the purpose of God in manifesting such *Lila*, it is, according to Vallabha, no other than making the souls which have been thus separated from Him, experience again communion and fellowship with Him. These latter become all the more valuable because of the previous separation. In this there is a kind of divine rhythm which goes on eternally. This rhythm remains even in the highest states which a soul might experience. As a matter of fact, the state of desolation or separation from God is even more impor-



tant in the eyes of Vallabha and his followers than that of union with God. As it has been put by some of them, in desolation one finds God everywhere, whereas in union only in one place.

Since God has such a purpose in view, He does not leave the souls that have been separated from Him to their own devices. He woos them by a series of successive steps or dispensations, bringing out thus the positive part of His *Lila*. He tries to win them gradually to Himself, thus setting right what has gone wrong. The first step in this process of return of the souls to God is taken by way of giving them the Scriptural Revelation. He grants them the Vedas which show to them some knowledge of His laws in order to teach them self-restraint. This is known as the *Karma-Kanda*, the dispensation of ritualistic duties and works. The souls follow this at first with a view to get happiness both in this world and in the next. Their *Karmas* are, therefore, *sakama*, self-interested, though with this difference between their former state and the present one, viz., that in their pre-Vedic stage they did not follow any law but that of their own self-will. Their obedience to the Vedas, provided it is sincere, soon shows to them that it does not give them that happiness or joy, which they are seeking out of the very necessity of their nature. This leads them to perform their ritualistic and other duties in a *nishkama*, disinterested manner, to follow the path of duty for the sake of duty alone. This teaches them real self-control, and if they persist in this path, with the help of the additional knowledge granted to them by the Revelation given in the Upanishads, they reach the *Akshara*, which is the outer body of God. This is the highest point they can reach in this path. These are the *Maryada* souls, whereas those who do not follow the law as revealed in the Vedas are *Pravaha* souls.

There is, however, a better way by far than this. For one thing this path of KARMA-KANDA is too long and tedious to follow and souls do not have always the necessary patience and perseverance to continue in it. Besides, the goal that is set before them in it



is not the highest. Looking to the whole of history, it may be said that God gave this dispensation of the Vedic Law to prepare humanity, or at any rate, the people of India for something larger and better that was soon to follow. In the words of St. Paul, the Law taught in the Vedas was a "school-master" to train humanity for the Way of Bhakti or Love.

We might add here that Vallabha looks upon *Jnana Kanda*, the Way of Knowledge, also more or less in the same manner as upon *Karma Kanda*. It is undoubtedly superior to the latter, and follows it naturally provided one has fulfilled one's duties properly. With the disappearance of self-will and the attainment of self-control, comes the right understanding of the universe and of God also to some extent. But even this Way does not lead to the final goal. Its ultimate goal is Akshara in which the souls purified by action of the right kind and illumined by knowledge get absorbed.

Both these ways, though Scriptural, are, however, long and difficult and they fall far short of the Final Beatitude even at their best. Besides, the advent of the Kali Yuga, the Dark Age, makes it impossible for people to follow them. Hence God found it proper to give another Dispensation, that of Bhakti, so that every one might find it easier to come to Him.

The Dispensation of Bhakti is vouchsafed by God through the manifestation of His own Person in the form of Incarnations culminating in that of Sri Krishna. This is the *Lila* wherein He manifests His own Beauty and Joy, evoking thereby the feelings of admiration, gratitude and love in the hearts of men. This appeals to the heart, the region of feeling, in man, making it easier for him to turn to God. Souls are attracted to Him because of His beautiful and gracious Personality, which proves irresistible. It is this *Lila* of God which gives rise to Bhakti, which is love for and devotion to God.

This Bhakti is usually divided into nine kinds, all of which Vallabha accepts as true. They are *sravan*, hearing : *kirtana*, praising : *smarana*, remembering : *padasevana*, worshipping of the feet of God : *archana*, ceremonial worshipping of God : *vandana*, bowing etc. to God : *dasya*, personal serving of God : *sakhya*, friendship with God : and *atma-nivedana*, absolute surrender to God. This nine-fold Bhakti is common to all the Sampradayas of Bhakti-Marga.

The speciality of Vallabha's teaching is that he starts with the last three stages of Bhakti mentioned here. He was fully conscious of the fact that he had a special revelation from God to preach an advanced form of the Bhakti Marga, or what was nothing less than a New Dispensation. God had manifested Himself anew to him for the propagation of this path which he called Pusti-Marga. Here God had taken the lead inasmuch as He had invited human souls, especially the elect ones, to Himself. It was out of the fulness of His grace that He had done this, and His grace was all along with men when they walked that Way. The great emphasis that Vallabha put thus on grace is remarkable and unique. Ordinarily not only Karma and Jnana but even Bhakti is supposed to spring from one's own self, whereas with him it is only a reflex action of the grace of God. The origin, development and perfection of Bhakti, according to him, are dependent almost, if not altogether, on God Himself. God is the beginning, the middle and the end, the *alpha* and the *omega* in the work of salvation.

The man's part, in Vallabha's view, lies in his total surrender to God in everything, surrender of body, mind and soul, and this to such an extent that all these become interpenetrated and filled with God. His Brahmavada teaches that man is but a part of God, that he is related to God as a part is to a whole. The relationship between the soul and God, however, is closer and more personal than this. God is the Father and the Mother, the Friend and the Lover of the soul,











that is not God. Even the nearest and the dearest relations of one are now dear only for the sake of God, and if they do not conform to the devotee's ideal for them, he becomes indifferent to them. They are no more his. Rather they become hindrances and are as such to be renounced if there is no other remedy. God must now be all in all for the devotee.

This stage of love is followed by what is called *vyasana*, which means addiction. The devotee becomes an inebriate of the experience of God. He can not live without it even for a single moment. This experience fills his mind and heart to such an extent that the world, not only in its *samsaric* form, but even in its true form, ceases to exist for him. The devotee now reaches a world or a plane of existence where only God and himself exist, and if there are others, they are God's elect ones like himself. *Vyasana* has been also defined as *asakti* combined with *nirodha*. This latter term has been defined in Vallabha's Church in a manner peculiar to itself. It means oblivion of even one's own self apart from God. Not only is the world in its *Jagata* form, but even one's own self, is transcended. There is thus a kind of destruction of the soul, *atma-nivritti*, and God is loved absolutely for His own sake, and the soul is loved as it is in God.

The climax of this stage is reached in what is called *Sarva-atmabhava*. The devotee now has the heart and spirit of God Himself, and he experiences God's own delight in himself and in all things. The light and joy of God pass through him upon all things and he, living in this light, sees and experiences all things as God Himself does. The soul has now become one with God, not in the sense of the monist of Shankara's school, but in that in which the lover becomes absolutely united with his beloved. It is a perfect union in and of love. It is an absorption in God, but of a kind in which there is room for an eternal rhythm of separation and union.

The Bhakta's experience now takes the form of only two states of consciousness, viz., *Viyoga*, separation from God, and *Sanyoga*, union with God. There is a regular alternation or rhythm between these feelings, both of them being equally good and necessary. As a matter of fact, Vallabha and his followers in common with Sri Chaitanya and his school, look upon *Viyoga* as more important than *Sanyoga*. This is true to such an extent that Vallabha has been looked upon by his followers as an incarnation of this *Viyoga* Bhakti. One wonders, however, why this is so. The present writer once asked the head of the Gaudiya Mission, a sub-sect of the Chaitanya Sampradaya, as to why it was that they did not emphasize the positive experience of peace and joy on the part of the devotee, when he replied that what they looked for in their spiritual life was not their own joy, but the pleasure of God. It was an answer very characteristic of the Vaishnavism of both Chaitanya and Vallabha, and showed a new way of looking at things of the spirit. They might well say that to think of and feel the attainment of peace and joy implies a kind of self-centredness, which, on however high a plane it be, cuts at the root of true Bhakti in which there is no room for self. To them the highest state is the one in which the soul reduces itself or rather is sublimated into a kind of steady flow of eager, passionate and all-consuming desire for God. Actual separation from God with the promise of union with Him is more valuable in their eyes than a union in which the feeling of distinction from God is lost.

The ideal types of Bhaktas, according to Vallabha, are the Gopis, and Nanda and Yasoda, the foster-parents of Sri Krishna. In them Bhakti is realized in *Dasya*, *Sakhya* and *Vatsalya* types. God is loved in terms of human relationships at their deepest and best. Rather these relationships are realized as they are in their original form in the mind of God. The Bhakta, owing to this Bhakti of his, is translated into the ideal world of God, which is Heaven itself. This is the real Kingdom of God, or better still, His own Household and Family.

Among the various types of Bhakti the one most prized by some of the followers of Vallabha is that of *Sringara*, the same that is known in the Chaitanya Sampradaya as the *Madhuryabhava*. This is the relationship that exists between the Lover and his Beloved. It is the ideal or heavenly sex-love, and is quite different from the one that we see in the world. This even at its best is an extremely gross form of the other. It is a mere *abhasa*, a reflection or a pale shadow of the original thing. The first essential in *Sringara* Bhakti is the absence of lust or desire of a sensual kind. Even to understand and appreciate it properly, one should be free from all carnality, and should have, besides, the grace of God. The Gopis alone had such absolute love for Krishna that they gave up everything including their self, and surrendered themselves whole-heartedly to Him. In them not only the antithesis between the flesh and the spirit but even that between law and grace was complete, and the love of God had taken the place of everything. What happens to man or woman in his or her first romantic love, was seen in them in its perfect form, for their object of love was God Himself, the Fount of Beauty and Joy. This love transfigured the entire world for them filling it with the beautiful form of Sri Krishna and shifted entirely the centre of their own being from themselves to Krishna. They died to themselves, or if they lived at all it was only to realize and love themselves as they were in God. They had no other being apart from God. Their love is spoken of as *Kama*, lust or desire, but it is qualified as being *alaukika*, supernatural. There is no trace in it of the *Gunas*, the material qualities of the things of the world or of the flesh. The Gopis are, according to Vallabha, the souls in which *Shuddha Pusti*, Pure Grace, is seen at its best. We must not here forget the fact that, according to Vallabha and his followers, this *Sringara* Bhakti is not meant for all. What is pure nectar might well be turned into the deadliest of poison if it is handled by those who have no right to it. This is what happened in course of time in the Church of Vallabha itself, but it was because his followers had missed the inner core of his teaching.

We might now have a look at the fruit which one reaps as the reward of his Seva or service of God. Although the Bhakti, according to this Pusti-Marga, is itself the means and the end, Vallabha, however, has spoken of the *falani*, fruits thereof. These may be considered incidental, for the eyes of the devotee are not at all set on them. Vallabha, in all probability, mentioned them because he felt it necessary to describe the conditions of Final Beatitude according to the New Way. He speaks of the reward as if it were in passing, without giving any elaborate details. This reticence on his part has resulted in much difference among his followers in their interpretations of this part of his teaching.

The first reward that the devotee gets after he has for all practical purposes destroyed his own self as an entity apart from God and known himself as he is in God, is *Alaukika Samarthya*, super-natural power. This is not to be understood in the sense of *Riddhis* and *Siddhis*, the miraculous powers attained by those who follow the path of Yoga. It is the power of pure love, a love so great that God Himself is constrained to look upon the soul as almost His master. It takes possession of God completely and makes Him dependent on the soul even as the latter is on Him. This was realized in the case of the Gopis who had made Krishna their captive and willing servant. For the sake of His Bhaktas, God surrenders His infinite glory and becomes like one of them, being bound to them with the ties of human relationships. He lives with them on terms of utmost intimacy and equality, and gives Himself to them without stint or reserve.

The second fruit is spoken of as *Sayujya*, which, according to all the Bhakti schools of thought, means association with God. This state is one of the four kinds of Mukti, Final Beatitude known to the Hindu mind, the other three being *Salokya*, residence on the same plane with God, *Sarupya*, having the likeness of God, and *Samipya*, closeness to God. The term *Sayujya* is understood also as absorption in God, which is considered to be the



of God, on the other hand, make the divine service altogether congregational, which is undoubtedly a great advantage. It saves the Images, besides, from being common and familiar objects.

There is another important difference between the worship called *puja* in ordinary Hindu temples and the one called *seva* in the Havelis of Vallabha's Church. *Puja* is usually offered with Vaidic or sectarian *mantras*, making it often a mechanical or conventional affair, whereas in the latter all that is demanded of the worshipper is personal love and service.

The fundamental difference between the two kinds of worship lies in the view each takes of the Image. In the temples the Images have a symbolic value and most worshippers are aware of the fact. On the other hand, it is a speciality of the teaching of Vallabha that the Images in the *havelis* are nothing but God Himself. This seems to have come to be recognised in Vallabha's own life-time as a special characteristic of his Church as against not only other Hindu bodies but even such a similar Bhakti movement as that of Sri Chaitanya. It is true Vallabha did not build many temples or *havelis*, but he initiated the worship of Images in his Church with some of its most important characteristics. He gathered together a number of Images from various sources, and consecrating these he gave them to some of his chief disciples for their private worship. These Images are now housed in several of the chief *havelis* belonging to his movement.

The very name given to these Images by Vallabha and his followers brings out their special character. They are called *Swarupas*, which means forms of God. In them the devotee sees Krishna Himself as He was in His childhood or boyhood. The divine service is organised round His life as it was lived while He was in Gokula, Vrandavana etc..

The *Seva* that is rendered to Sri Krishna in the form of these *Swarupas* of His, is eightfold. The daily life of Krishna is

divided into eight parts, each having a service appropriate to itself. It is only at these times that God is "at home" to His devotees, who are ushered into His presence for the sake of having His *darshana*, which means seeing Him. Usually this service does not last more than a quarter of an hour, which makes it an act of concentrated devotion on the part of the devotees. This is all the more so because the latter have been longing to have this *darshana* and waiting for it in the outer court of the house of God. It is a sight to see these people rushing into the inner house as soon as the doors are opened to have a look at their *Thakorjee*, Lord, with an eagerness and love which are rarely seen in other Hindu temples. There are, besides, always some people who, because of their late arrival run in the streets for this *darshana*, crying out aloud *Jaya, Jaya*, glory, glory, so that the period of service might be lengthened ever so little on their account. In all this, the idea of separation from God and the longing which it generates in the heart of the devotee, together with union with Him, which play so important a part in the Bhakti movements of India, find their realization and fulfilment. The separation from God and meeting Him face to face, the two poles round which much of Bhakti at its best moves, are represented here in every act of worship.

The public worship of this kind has another important feature, viz., that it is altogether congregational. It is public in the full sense of the term. God delights to meet all his devotees together in a body, as if He were holding a court or a levee, which desire on His part is fully responded to by them and they delight in losing themselves in Him and in one another. Here there is no mediator between God and the Bhaktas, no Guru and no priest, and the entire congregation stands in the immediate presence of God as one body. The goal set before them in the *darshana* is that the senses, the mind, the heart and the spirit of every individual should so sink themselves in God that the devotee should be almost oblivious of his own existence for the time being.

This does create in its turn a remarkable feeling of union with God and with one another. Indeed, one wonders if the congregational consciousness realized at the time of the divine service in this Church, is not one of its unique features.

It must not be assumed from this that individual worship or service has no place in this Sampradaya. Such service also is equally binding upon every disciple, who, on receiving initiation or *Brahma-sambandha*, is enjoined to have private worship of his or her own, and those who are truly religious have each an Image of Krishna for such a purpose. An Image is found in almost every important Vaishnava home, and it is handed down from generation to generation as the most precious possession of the family. If the devotee be not advanced enough in his religious life, he is satisfied with a picture of Krishna, a sort of icon, to which he offers his worship daily. He does this at least once during the day, worshipping it with the usual *Mantra*, *Sri Krishna sharnam mama*, May Krishna be my refuge, on the beads of a rosary. In addition to this some food specially prepared for the purpose must be offered to the Image, failing which a piece of sugar-candy and if possible some green or dry fruit are invariably offered. This becomes *prasada*, sanctified food, and is eaten with a genuine feeling of devotion by the devotee and his family. Children look forward to receiving this *prasada*, with an eagerness which, though profoundly human, is not without a touch of divinity. When the devotee, emerging out of the chamber of worship is surrounded by children clamouring for the *prasada*, he or she might well feel the presence of God Himself in these little ones, and their joy at receiving the holy food might indeed look to the devotee as the joy of God Himself. The God whom the devotees of this faith worship in these Images or Icons, the Divine Child Krishna, Bala Krishna, is present with them in a far truer sense in these children, and serving them becomes a true service or worship of God. The act of private devotion on the part of the devotee is met by a corresponding act of grace on the part of the Deity in

the sanctification of the food or whatever is offered to the Image. This is followed by an act of gracious love done to the little ones or other members of the family by the devotee in the distribution of the sanctified food, with the result that God, the worshipper and the members of the family come to be knitted together in a kind of blessed union. Some of the happiest memories of the early boyhood of the present writer are clustered round this act of love and grace on the part of his great grandmother and father. This private devotion takes place invariably in the morning after the ablutions including the bath.

As for the divine service in the *havelis*, it is performed eight times every day. Each of these services has a special name for itself and has some peculiar features of its own. An element of variety, which helps to relieve the monotony that might otherwise attend the services, is thus introduced. The daily life of Krishna is divided into eight sections representing different functions of his life and work, and He is served in each accordingly.

The first of these *darshanas* called *Mangala*, takes place in the morning and is centred round the act of awakening Him. The next *darshana*, *Sringara*, shows Krishna as dressed up for the day. The Image is then presented for the third time in the act of going out with the cows for the purpose of grazing them in the meadows. This is known as *Gwala* meaning Shepherd. The fourth *darshana* takes place at noon, when Krishna is supposed to take his lunch in the forest with his boy-companions. This is known as *Rajabhoga*. The fifth is that of awakening him from his mid-day nap and is called *Utthapana*. This is followed by one in which Krishna takes in the afternoon with his friends the food left from their mid-day meal. It is called *Bhoga*. The seventh *darshana* of the series represents Krishna in the act of bringing the cows from the meadow, and is called *Sandhya*, which means twilight. The last shows Him in the act of retiring to bed. It is known as *Shayana* i. e. going to sleep. Three of these



*darshanas* attract a larger number of people than others chiefly because of the hours of the day when they take place. They are *Sringara* shown at about eight o'clock in the morning: *Rajabhoga* at noon and *Sandhya* in the evening. Men, women and even children gather together at these times to have a look at their beloved Lord, and having done this they go away satisfied for the rest of the day. Those who come before the time when the doors of the inner chamber of the Deity open, wait outside in what may be called the ante-chamber of the Lord. They pass this time in some Havelis in hearing the exposition of a Scriptural book, usually one of the Vaishnava Puranas by some learned Brahmin. This kind of public reading is not a common practice, however. The Church of Vallabha would be much better in every way for having regular readings of this kind once or twice a day, especially in the bigger *havelis*.

Each of the eight presentations of the Deity has a form appropriate to itself, which provides enough variety in the scene to the devotee. Some food, cooked anew in the interval between one *darshana* and another, is served each time to the Image. The scene, besides, varies from day to day, and season to season. The clothes, food, environment etc. of the Image, are all different in every season, everything being done with the sole view of keeping the Image, which is thought of as a living delicate Child, in comfort. On holidays, which are many in number, the scene changes altogether, and there is a tide of joyful festivity all over the place.

The *Bhava* or devotional feeling which finds free scope in these divine services is of the type known as *Dasya*, service, or as *Vatsalya*, parental love and fondness. As has been said again and again, the Deity that the Church of Vallabha worships, is Krishna as he was in his childhood and boyhood. He is known as Bala-Krishna, and the members of this Sampradaya lavish upon Him all their love as they do upon their own child. This *Vatsalya Bhava*,



as practised in this Church, is perhaps unique, and has no parallel in any other religious body whether in India or outside, at least so far as its intensity is concerned. The *Bhakti* of the Chaitanya Sampradaya is decidedly more intense on the whole, but it is of the *Madhurya* type, the love of the beloved for her lover. The ideal type of *Bhakti* in the latter is the love of Radha, whereas in the Church of Vallabha it is that of Nanda and Yasoda, the foster-parents of Krishna, and of the Gopis and Gopas in general. The followers of Vallabha try to assimilate themselves as much as possible to the character of all these persons, especially in its *Vatsalya* and *Dasya* aspects. They rarely think of themselves as the Gopis, milk-maids, with whom Krishna is said to have played and danced. In the biographical literature of Vallabha's Sampradaya, which consists of the character-sketches of eighty-four disciples of his, and of two-hundred fifty two disciples of his son Vitthalanatha, including men and women of various types, we come across few cases of the Sringara or Madhurya type. The religious experience prized as the highest by most of these is the one in which Krishna actually plays with them or eats the food offered to him. Besides, most of the songs sung on the occasion of the various services are put into the mouth of Yasoda, and the atmosphere created is that of the childhood and boyhood of the Deity Incarnate tenderly awaited upon and attended to, fondled, fed and looked after in every conceivable way, by loving parents, friends and companions.

One more thing in connection with this public worship deserves to be noticed. The Images of the Lord are in some places associated with a companion of the other sex. This other person is called Swaminijee, the Lady, corresponding to the term *Thakorjee*, i. e. the Lord, usually applied to Krishna. This other Image, however, plays a small part in the worship. It is there because of the belief that grew up among the Hindus from early times that God has an eternal co-partner with Him of the other sex in the work of Creation, Preservation and Redemption of the

Universe. The conventional character of this Image is confirmed by the fact that it is known by the general name Swaminijee rather than any particular one. The Vaishnavas themselves are not always sure whether it represents Rukhmani, the wedded wife of Krishna, or Radha, or any other, as we have found from our talks with some of them. There are two or three Psalms of Vitthalnatha in which Swaminijee is identified with Radha, but somehow or other this belief did not grow in this Church. Some Vaishnavas of early days looked upon Yamuna as Swaminijee, and in the book *The Stories of Two Hundred and Fifty-two Vaishnavas*, Radha is conspicuously absent. Looking to all this Swaminijee seems to be a collective name for Gopis, the ideal devotees rather than anything else.

We have seen in a preceding chapter that the aim of the Church of Vallabha is to worship God in His Ananda-form, which is His highest and truest Form. This Form is, moreover, full of beauty, and God is spoken of as Beauty or the Fount of Beauty. Accordingly the worship is made as joyful and beautiful as it is possible to do. Most of the arts are pressed into the service of the divine worship with the sole purpose of giving delight to God. We see here aesthetics in some of its highest forms dedicated to the service of God and being sanctified in its turn by such use. In the realm of both aesthetics and art nothing is considered too mean or too precious, for such worship. God is served with food which varies from the most ordinary kind to the richest and choicest of dishes: the same variety is found in the clothes and the jewellery with which the Images are dressed up and adorned: the divine service is accompanied with music of all kinds from the simplest to the most elaborate. This has resulted in a remarkable development of some arts, and an enrichment and refinement of the life of large numbers of people.

Perhaps the most outstanding example among these arts is that of cookery. It may be said without exaggeration that the

art of cookery, as it has been practised in the Church of Vallabha in connection with its public worship, is the best in all India. It must be said here that this applies only to vegetarian food, for meat of all kinds is eschewed altogether in this Church along with all Vaishnava Churches. Foods of all kinds, the number of which runs easily into hundreds if not thousands, and from the simplest to the most complex, are cooked during the course of the year for the pleasure of the Deity. Many of these things have a taste of their own and some of them excel by far similar dishes cooked anywhere else. Everything is made as far as possible of the best materials available without any consideration of the cost thereof. In the *Haveli* at Sri Nathdwara, the chief house of God in this Church, food in various forms worth more than a thousand Rs. is offered every day to the Image. Every *haveli* spends money for this purpose in proportion to its importance and wealth. The Vaishnavas of this Church show in this matter a lavishness and magnificence which are unmatched anywhere else. One need not surmise from this that such a course is bound to end in much waste of food and money. The followers of the faith take good care that not an atom of this sanctified food or *prasada*, is thrown away. To do this is a kind of sin in their eyes. Usually much of this holy food is consumed by the poor members of the Church. In bigger places like Sri Nathdwara, Bombay etc., a good part of this PRASADA is given to the servants in lieu of pay. These sell it in their turn to the public, to whom it comes like a boon from God, for it is as good as any they can get for the price they pay.

Another art highly developed in this body is that of dressing the Image in proper and beautiful clothes. We must remember that the Vaishnavas of this Church believe that the Image is God Himself, and with this in view they do everything to please Him. Because of this there is no half-heartedness in their service of the Image. Accordingly clothes are made of various styles and often of the finest material available. The Thakorjee is the Lord and

King, and so He should lack nothing. His wardrobe must be as full and rich as that of any Prince. The dresses made for the Image are of all kinds to suit different seasons and even times of the day. Besides, the aim of making the Image look as beautiful as possible is always kept in view. This does not mean much cost, for the Images in most places are very small in size. All that has been said here about clothes is true of jewellery also, of which there is plenty of all kinds, especially in big *havelis*.

The art of decoration also holds a high place in this Church. This has been developed so much as to become a fine art almost. It is seen at its best on all festive occasions, when a lavish use is made of fresh leaves and flowers of all kinds. This is true especially of the Holi festival, which marks the beginning of the spring. Flowers of all sorts are available in plenty at this time, and they are used so freely and with such good taste in decorating the house of God and the Image itself, that the scene presented makes a deep appeal to one's senses of sight and smell and also to the imagination. Vallabha's Church does not believe in asceticism; rather otherwise. It believes that God has made the world, that it is good and beautiful, and that it is His manifestation, limited as it may be. It believes, besides, that good as everything belonging to the material world is, it can be made better and holier by being used in the service of God. This is the sole purpose of God in making all things. It also believes that the best way to sanctify our own life is to use everything after it has been consecrated by God. Accordingly all the products of the earth, and especially those which are beautiful, are used as sacramental sense-foods and a way is found from them to God.

Among the fine arts, music holds a high place in the daily service in some HAVELIS. It has been said elsewhere that this Church had from the beginning of its career several poets who composed religious music of the highest kind. Suradasa being the chief among them. All these together with those who followed



them in the next generation wrote a number of exquisite songs depicting the various phases of the life of Krishna as a child and a boy. These contain some of the finest pastoral poetry in the world together with a large number of carols, lullabies and songs of all sorts. These songs set to various tunes are sung in the classical style of music in some HAVELIS.

One of the most important features of Indian Music is the correspondence and harmony between the various tunes and the phenomena of Nature. The different times of the day and seasons of the year have each tunes appropriate to themselves. This harmony is well observed in the religious music associated with the public worship of Vallabha's Church. It is worth noting that this is perhaps the only religious body in the northern part of India at any rate, which is meticulously particular in regard to this matter. In a few *Havelis* at least, songs are sung before the Deity in tunes suitable to the different seasons in a manner worthy of the best classical tradition. For example, the first service begins with songs sung in the tunes called Bhairava, Bibhasa and Ramkeli with the accompaniment of Bina, Sitar etc. At about nine o'clock in the morning which is the time for the second presentation of the Image, Bilavala is sung, and the mid-day lunch of the Image is celebrated with songs sung in Saranga. The tiffin in the afternoon has its music in the tune called Soratha. The evening service makes use of the tunes known as Gaudi and Purvi. Then come songs in Yamana and in the last service the Image is put to bed with songs sung in Bihaga. The same variety is found in tunes used at different times of the year. During the festivities of the Hindu New Year, which falls on the first day of the month of Kartika, Bilavala holds the field. The spring shows the predominance of Kafi and Saranga, and Malhara is sung from the start of the monsoon. We have given here but the barest outline of this music, which in actual practice is highly elaborate and has all the variety that Indian music can show. The result of the use of this and other arts in the divine service in Vallabha's Church is the



achievement of a remarkable harmony between Nature in all her beautiful aspects, Art in some of its finest phases and Devotion which is as tender as it is deep. In all probability this is the only religious body, not only in India but all over the world, which has succeeded in creating such a harmony in its divine worship.

The development of the divine service described here was brought about by Vitthalnatha, Vallabha's son and successor. Besides being a devotee of God, he was a poet as well as a musician of a high order. He was a creative artist who devoted his manifold gifts and powers to the service of God, and his noblest work perhaps is the organisation of the divine service of his Church. He was called Gita-Sangita-Sagara, the Ocean of Song and Music, a name which he deserved fully. It was due to him that the public worship of this religious body has become unique of its kind in the world. He knew what it is to worship God in beauty and magnificence, and he taught millions to do the same.

In this connection it is worth noting that just at the time when the Mogul dynasty was being established firmly in India under Akbar, God was raising up in the neighbourhood of Delhi a religious Church which set up Houses and Courts of God in almost every important place in Rajputana, Malwa and Gujarata. Here God was worshipped eight times a day throughout the year, with a magnificence which few earthly Princes could command, let alone the love and devotion which were as remarkable as any ever known. Here was Hindu Nationalism, or rather the National Faith, manifesting itself in its loveliest and most attractive form. It is no wonder if a number of the Rajput Princes in India adopted the faith of Vallabha. They were assured in their mind that the God of their fathers, Sri Krishna the Incarnate One, had come to them again in the form of these Images, and that He graciously desired to give them the greatest of blessings, viz., Himself. It is no wonder again that they and the people surrendered themselves whole-heartedly to this call of Krishna, and if these Houses of God were invested with much glory.

The question may well be asked if the use of these arts and the presence of many costly objects in the divine service do not tend to make it in any way sensuous. The answer is an emphatic *no*. For one thing, the service is saved from being such owing to the high order of aestheticism attending it. A remarkable sense of proportion and beauty manifest themselves in all things concerning it, with the result that it transcends the senses and makes a deep appeal to the mind and the imagination. This is not all. In the divine service the feeling of the Presence of God in the Images overshadows everything else. The worshippers who are often present in large numbers, have their eyes, heart and spirit set on the Deity before them, and all things in connection with the worship are viewed from that angle. Even on occasions of festivity, especially the Hindu New Year's Day, when hundreds of dishes of the choicest kinds of food are placed before the Image, the divine service maintains its spiritual character as fully as ever. Rather it becomes more so at such times, for the atmosphere is surcharged with a heightened feeling of devotion worthy of the festival. It is true there is a dramatic touch about the service such as the opening of the doors and the removal of the curtain before the Image, but this in no way detracts from its deeply religious character. This is similar to some of the practices in the Roman Catholic Churches, where the elevation of the Host is accompanied by certain outward acts. Sometimes the work of the officiants, who are members of a particular Brahmin caste, may degenerate into play-acting at the hands of those who lack devotion and do their work as mere professionals. Such things are bound to happen in every Church. But, so far as the majority of worshippers are concerned, the Presence of God in the Image is real to them, and it generates in them a genuine feeling of devotion. One has only to see them at their *darshana* in order to understand and appreciate the reality and intensity of their religious feeling.

As regards the various kinds of foods offered to the Image, the clothes, the ornaments and the floral and other decorations

the presence of God therein as in few other things. It is this to such an extent that even the word *Seva* is not so much used for it as *Darshana*, which means the seeing of God. The devotees come to the *Havelis* not for *Seva* but for *Darshana*. As we have said before, the followers of this Church look upon the Image as the very God of God, and seeing Him here constitutes for them the goal of their life, at least for the time being. At their best, they are supposed to pass the rest of their time in a state of *Viraha*, separation with a longing to meet Him again as early as possible. Again at the time of the *darshana* they do not repeat any set formulas, nor do they offer any prayers, nor do they contemplate or meditate. They satisfy themselves just with seeing the Image or rather their God in it. Even kneeling or bowing down is not necessary, for that would divert the attention of the devotee from the Image. Just the sight of the Image is enough for them and it is for most of them the means and the end of their *Bhakti*. This looks to be, nay, is an act of extreme simplicity, but it is just in this that there lies all its charm and value. The more unsophisticated and child-like a person is, the more he is fitted for this kind of worship or devotion. Here in the very presence of God they all stand as equals, the rich and the poor, the wise and the ignorant, the Brahmin and the Sudra, the men and the women, and the old and the young, and it is the aim of all to forget whatever distinctions they may have. They are supposed to forget even their separate identities for the time being and they do succeed in this to some extent at any rate. The Image draws them all to itself just as a magnet draws particles of iron, and the devotees are held together just as the latter are round about the magnet. The devotees become so many points or arrow-heads surcharged with love and deep emotion and are held to the Image and to one another by the force emanating from what they look upon as their God. All this gives the public worship or service of this Church a character of its own, and it makes it almost unique among the worships of different kinds all over the world.

## BOOK III

### CHAPTER I

#### **Goswami Vitthalnatha**

Vallabha left behind him two sons named Gopinatha and Vitthalnatha. The first of these, born in Samvata 1570, was seventeen years old, and the second, born in Samvata 1572, was fifteen years old at the time of Vallabha's death. It now fell to their lot to carry on their father's work, which was not an easy task, since Vallabha had done very little in the way of organising his movement. He had a number of disciples who were deeply devoted to him and had, besides, consecrated themselves to the new movement. There were, however, few among them who were able to lead it now that he was no more. The two brothers lived together at Adel for some years more after their father's death, and things were kept moving somehow or other. We do not know when Vallabha's mother and wife passed away. Like much else in the early history of this Church these events are enshrouded in uncertainty. Very likely Vallabha's wife survived him only a few years more.

The leadership of the Church remained in the hands of Gopinatha since he was the older of the two brothers. Unfortunately he passed away soon leaving the rising body in greater difficulties than ever, at least for some time more. He seems to

have had some literary talents and is said to have written two small books, *Sadhandipika* and *Sevapaddhati*. We do not know the year of his death, but very likely he died at least about a decade after Vallabha's death.

Gopinatha left behind him a son, a mere child, whose minority created a difficult situation. His mother stuck firmly to his claim to be the head of the Church, and she was supported in this by some disciples of Vallabha. Others were, however, strongly opposed to this move on her part, especially as they knew the risk that the Church would be running in having a child and a regent mother at its head, just when it had begun its career. These men put the leadership into the hands of Vitthalnatha, knowing well that the Church would prosper under him. This move on their part gave much offence to the widow of Gopinatha, and she left Adel with her son in high dudgeon, carrying away all the MSS of Vallabha etc. Soon after her son died, leaving Vitthalnatha as the sole and undisputed head of the body. This was providential, because the new Church wanted then a man who was strong and big enough not only to consolidate the work of Vallabha but to expand it in every direction, a task for which no one was more fitted than Vitthalnatha.

The traditions of this Church represent Vitthalnatha in his boyhood as given more to play than to studies. His father had made provision for his education under one Madhava Saraswati, but his mind was not in his books. He is said to have been, however, a student of the Bhagavata Purana from his early days, which was a great blessing, because it moulded his mind and heart in accordance with the highest ideals of his father. This seems to have been an unconscious influence, since his awakening to his responsibility as a son of Vallabha is attributed to a timely exhortation of Damodardas, the chief disciple of his father. The old man had set his hopes on him as the only person likely to carry on the work of Vallabha, and he eagerly desired that he



should fulfil his duties properly. This solicitude on the part of Damodardas was richly rewarded, for Vitthalnatha soon devoted himself whole-heartedly to the mission set before him.

It is said that after his spiritual awakening the first task which Vitthalnatha took in hand was to grasp the proper nature of his father's work, a matter in which he received much help from Damodardas. It is perhaps more proper to say that the latter initiated him into this step by step. None knew better than Damodardas the mind of Vallabha, and as the chief disciple of the great teacher he felt it his duty to see that his youthful ward was fully equipped for the work lying before him. Accordingly he led Vitthalnatha into the full knowledge and practice of the New Way, and revealed to him all that he knew of Vallabha's aims and plans. The young man, on his part, surrendered himself wholly to this training, looking upon Damodardas as his *Guru*. It is indeed very creditable to him that he learnt all that he could from the latter and also from a few other members of the Church. A man called Chacha ( Uncle ) Harivamsha is mentioned specially as one of his guides at this period of his life.

Vitthalnatha was a man of great and varied gifts. He was even a genius and that of a high order. It is true he did not have the extraordinary intellectual powers of his father, but this lack was amply made up by his deep emotion and rich imagination. He was a poet, a musician and a composer, and he devoted all his gifts to the service of God. He was a creative artist with a remarkable gift of beautifying everything to which he put his hand. He was, besides, great as an organiser, and was an enthusiastic missionary. The Church of Vallabha was extremely fortunate in having him as its leader at a time when it had hardly begun its existence. When he took the reins in his hands, it was but a tender plant, and it was solely due to his genius and manifold talents that it developed into a mighty tree before he passed away.

Vitthalnatha is great enough to deserve a biography to himself; and it is a pity that his Church has made no attempt to write one. So far as the present work is concerned, all that we can do is to draw a mere sketch of some of his main activities. Unfortunately, here again we are faced with the same difficulties as those in the case of his father, for few definite dates are available as regards the main events of his life. Under the circumstances we can mention only a few of the outstanding things he did in the course of a ministry extending over half a century.

Vitthalnatha seems to have started going on his missionary tours soon after he assumed the leadership of his Church. The Province of Gujarata was his first objective in this matter, for he is said to have gone to it in Samvata 1600 (1544 A. D.) Vallabha himself had found this Province a fertile field for the sowing of his seed, and his son began now to reap a rich harvest. On his first visit to it, he seems to have confined his activities round about Ahmedabad, the chief city of the Province. He came here again in Samvata 1613 (1557 A. D.). It was about this time that Nagji Bhatta of Godhara, an officer of some importance, became a disciple of the new faith. This man, a Brahmin by caste, proved extremely helpful to the Church by spreading its influence all round and making many people disciples thereof. The well-known Gujarati scholar and translator of Jayadeva's *Gita-Govinda*, the late Keshava Harshada Dhruva, was a descendant of this man.

Vitthalnatha had another important disciple in Bhaila Kothari of Ahmedabad. A son of this man, Gopaldas by name, has made himself immortal in the history of the Church, by writing several poems concerning the new faith. Of these the most important is Navakhyana, in which he described the rise and growth of the Church. His poems were the first Gujarati compositions celebrating the glory of the new faith, and they have attained the rank of classics in the Sampradayic literature owing to the subjects dealt with and their charming style. Even to-day after nearly three

centuries they are read and recited by the Vaishnavas of Vallabha's Church not only in Gujarata but in Hindi-speaking parts of India also, and commentaries in Sanskrit and *Vraja-Bhasha* have been written on them. It is said that the attitude of the followers of this Sampradaya towards its Acharyas, i. e. the male members of the family of Vallabha, has been determined largely by his poem Navakhyana. He is said to have been mute in his younger days and cured by Vitthalnatha in a miraculous manner, an event which led him to devote himself to the glorification of the new faith.

Vitthalnatha secured another disciple, Jiva Parekh, in Cambay. He was a Bania by caste, and owing to his high position in society and character, wielded much influence among his people. It was due to his efforts and to those of Bhaila Kothari, also a Bania, that large groups of people belonging to various communities joined the new Church. The province of Gujarata has been for centuries under the influence of Jainism, a religion which has helped much in raising the entire population to a high level of civilization and culture. The Banias have been the leading community in the Jain Samgha, and it was from them that many were converted to the new faith. This naturally proved to be a source of much strength and influence to the cause. Vitthalnatha is said to have visited Gujarata six times in all, which shows the rich response he had succeeded in securing among its people.

In the early part of his ministry, besides consolidating and expanding his father's work, Vitthalnatha was faced with the problem of finding a secure home for himself. The period he lived in was a turbulent one in the history of India, especially for that part of the country where his father had made his home. Vallabha's passing away was almost synchronous with that of Babar, the founder of the Mogul dynasty. Soon after Babar's death, his son Humayun was conquered and driven away from India. During the years that intervened between the defeat of Humayun and the accession of Akbar to the throne of Delhi and for several

years after that, India knew no peace. Wars were going on constantly all the time between various Kingdoms and States throughout the land, and conditions were still worse in the part of the country surrounding Delhi. Vitthalnatha had to leave Adel owing to an invasion of the province in which this place was situated by a Moslem Prince in Samvata 1619 (1563 A. D.). He went with his family to a place called Vandha, the chief of which, Ramchandra, was very friendly to him. After staying here for a few months, he proceeded further south to Gadha, a place in Central India. Vitthalnatha's choice of this place as a safe harbour for himself and his family was due to its being ruled then by the great Rajput Princess Durgavati.

This Princess has made herself immortal in the annals of Rajput history by her ability and sagacity as a ruler and remarkable heroism displayed on the battle-field. At a time when most of the Rajput Princes in Rajputana and Marwar were proving themselves more or less indifferent to the interests of the Hindu religion, culture and nationality, she kept the flag of Hinduism flying in undiminished glory. This redounds to her credit all the more since Gadha was a small state. She was a widow and was ruling the kingdom as the regent of her son who was a minor when his father died. She was a woman of strong character and as the times were pretty bad, she continued to rule even when the young prince attained his majority. The part of the country in which Gadha was situated, being full of hills and jungles, had never been conquered so far by the Moslems. She had fought with different Mohemmedan Princes without being conquered by any one of them. She had a strong army with 20000 cavalry and 1000 elephants, which she used to lead herself in battle. Owing to her victories over some of the Moslem princes and others who had wantonly invaded her territory, desiring to take advantage of her position as a woman, and due to her good government and thrift, she had amassed a lot of wealth.



Gadha was thus too rich a prize not to excite the cupidity of Khwaja Abdul Majid, one of the generals of Akbar, who was appointed governor of Karra, a place near Gadha. After making full inquiries about the territory he attacked the place with a large army. The Rani gave him battle at the head of her army. She was struck by an arrow in the course of fighting, and seeing that she would be taken a prisoner, she took hold of a dagger from the driver of her elephant, and plunging it into her stomach died on the spot. The battle being lost the Moslem general took possession of the state after reducing one or two more forts. He secured, besides, a large booty in the form of wealth of all kinds, about which *The Tarikh-i Alfi*, a Moslem history, says "that it was impossible to compute even the tenth part of it." Thus ended the life of one of the noblest of Rajput Princesses that India has ever known. For this wanton destruction of her and her kingdom, even Akbar must be held partly responsible. In the words of Vincent Smith, "Akbar's attack on a princess of a character so noble, was mere aggression, wholly unprovoked and devoid of all justification other than the lust for conquest and plunder."

It was to such a Princess that Vitthalnatha came seeking asylum from dangers that confronted him in the north. The name and fame of Rani Durgavati had spread far and wide not only as a ruler of acknowledged ability but also as a patroness of Hindu religion and culture. She was a woman of high character and was devoted to religion. Because of this, many refugees, especially of the Brahmin community, had flocked to her kingdom for protection from Moslem persecution. When Vitthalnatha came to her place, she recognised him from the start as a religious leader of much importance. She was highly impressed by his noble character and bearing, his devotion and learning, and gave him every possible help to make his stay in Gadha comfortable and happy. Vitthalnatha stayed here three years. While he was in this place, his wife, Rukhmani, passed away leaving behind her a number of children. Vitthalnatha was then well advanced in middle age



being forty-eight years old, but he contracted another marriage taking a girl from a community of Telugu Brahmins who had settled down in these parts. In extenuation of this step on his part at this age, it is said that he did it under pressure from Rani Durgavati. It is also said that he was given by the Princess one hundred and eight villages by way of gift for his religious work, and that he gave these away to the Telugu Brahmins when he left Gadha.

Vitthalnatha soon saw that even Gadha was not safe from Moslem depredations. Because of this or perhaps thinking that his real work lay in the north, he desired to return to Vraja-land. By this time Akbar's rule was well established and there was peace in the country surrounding Delhi at any rate. This may have been another cause why he desired to go northwards. Rani Durgavati fully concurred with him in this idea and helped him with funds for building residential houses in Mathura for him and his large family. These came to be known as *Sat-Ghara*, Seven Houses, because he lived here with his seven sons. These are no longer in existence, but the site on which they stood is still known by that name.

Vitthalnatha had on the whole a happy stay in Gadha. He did all he could while here to preach and establish his faith among the people. To this end he celebrated once the *Rathotsava*, the Car Festival, on a grand scale, with Rani Durgavati, her court and the entire populace taking an enthusiastic part in it. This was a new way of propagating his faith, and but for the conquest and destruction of Durgavati's kingdom, in all probability the character of the new Church would have been different from what it is to-day. Vitthalnatha's efforts to celebrate this festival here were meant to give his form of Vaishnavism a national character such as the Vaishnavism of Ramanuja had attained in the South. They were, however, full of risks in the part of India dominated by Moslems, and he wisely abstained from them. Vitthalnatha's work in Gadha, whatever it was, came to an end when he left the place.

From Gadha Vitthalnatha is said to have gone first to Prayaga where he stayed for some time. From here he went to Mathura in Samvata 1623 (1567 A. D.) and stayed there for six years. He then transferred his residence to Gokula where he lived to the end of his days. He is said to have left Mathura because of the antagonism of the Brahmins there. Besides, the fact that Krishna lived in Gokula in his childhood and boyhood, and that all the associations of his life in the period of his perfect incarnation, centred round it, may have also weighed with Vitthalnatha in his selection of it for his abode.

Vitthalnatha had now found a real home after years of wandering from one place to another. He was well advanced in age and had a numerous family of sons and daughters and even grand-children. Most men in India at his age would have rested on their oars and left things to take care of themselves. He was, however, differently made, and had an inexhaustible spring of vitality within himself. This rose from his deep faith in God fortified by the conviction that he was entrusted with a great mission. This made him as active as ever, and one is pleased to note that the period of his life dating from his settling down in Gokula is the most fruitful of all. Incidentally this activity of his shows the deep-rooted faith on the part of Vallabha's Church in the reality of the world as the creation of God and the theatre of His Lila.

One of the most important tasks, now set before himself by Vitthalnatha, was the creation of a proper form of worship in accordance with the new teaching. He now devoted his rich talents to the organisation of what is called *Seva*, Service of God, as contrasted with Puja or worship of God. It seems that the Church of Vallabha had only one temple or shrine in its possession so far, viz., that in which Sri Govardhannatha was installed. We have already traced the history of this shrine until the moment when it came into the sole possession of Vitthalnatha elsewhere.

in the present work. Some time after this event, the Image was brought to the house of Vitthalnatha, perhaps with a view to confirm him fully in his title over it. It was here that the power of Vitthalnatha as a creative artist found full scope for expression. He had now with him the Image, which had made its appearance in a miraculous manner, and was believed to have been installed and worshipped centuries ago by Vraja, the king of the Yadavas, after it was brought over by Arjuna from Dwarka. It had been worshipped, besides, by his father in whose life it had played a most important part. In addition to this, Vitthalnatha was now living in Gokula, the very place, where Krishna had lived and played and performed all his *lila*. These things, together with the quiet and peaceful atmosphere of the place, it being a mere village, presented to him ideal conditions for creating a new and original form of worship or service. He could not have done this but for the fact that, besides being a poet and an artist, a musician and a composer, he was a true devotee of God. He shared fully with his father the conviction that a New Dispensation had been given to them in *Pusti Marga*, the Way of Grace, and felt that the worship of God in it should also be new in accordance with the spirit of the New Gospel.

We have described the special features of the divine service conducted in this Church elsewhere, which makes it unnecessary for us to write much about it here. Suffice it to say here that Vitthalnatha's aim in re-organising this service was to re-create the conditions and atmosphere as described in the tenth book of the *Bhagavata*. To him, the Image was a *Swarupa*, form of God, even Krishna Himself, and it was to be served even as the foster-parents of Krishna and the Gopas and the Gopis had served Him in Gokula. Even the term *puja*, worship, is eschewed, for it denotes distance between the worshipper and the object worshipped and is accompanied usually with the repetition of some *mantras* etc., which makes it formal and mechanical. Here God is served with one's heart and hands even as Krishna was in Gokula. The goal sought

in every act of service is the immediate pleasure of God, and it is attained only when the service is founded on love or rather is an expression of love. Besides, as God Himself is the Fount of Joy and Beauty, the service also is to be full of joy and beauty. The chief characteristics of this service, therefore, are Love, Joy and Beauty, and it is in the production of these that the genius of Vitthalnatha is seen at its best. He so organised the service as to give it these qualities, and in this he succeeded beyond measure.

This service is of such a character that even the simplest of people can participate in it. Rather it is meant for them. Vitthalnatha kept before himself the ideal of the Gopas and the Gopis, who were unsophisticated, illiterate village people. In this service Krishna is served as he was in his childhood and boyhood, and as the service centres round his daily life, it becomes domestic in character. It brings into full play all the relationships that we come across in the life of a child, such as those of parents to a child, companionship of children and boys among themselves, neighbours' love for and fondling of a beautiful child etc., etc., making it thus a kind of family affair. This is, however, something divine, an approximation to that divine *lila* which Krishna had performed while he was on earth. In this service *Vairagya* or non-attachment, *Jnana* or knowledge, *Dhyana* or contemplation etc., have no place. They are considered secondary in importance if at all. Every act of worship is a creation of ideal values, some restoration to the Ideal World of things and sentiments and characters that belong to it. As such it means Life and more Life. To have realized such a high ideal of worship in his Church makes it, indeed, a glorious achievement on the part of Vitthalnatha.

We have already seen that Vitthalnatha was both a poet and a musician of a high order. He dedicated as such his talents to the singing of the praises of God and making the service as rich as possible in song and music. He composed a number of beautiful Psalms, *Stotras*, some of which are daily sung in almost



every *haveli* belonging to the Sampradaya. One of these is known as *Mangala Mangalam* since it begins with these words. It is sung every morning for the purpose of awakening the Image. *Prabodha* is another of such Psalms. There are others meant to be sung on special occasions. Vitthalnatha was not the only poet and musician of his Church in his time. Like his father, he was surrounded by several men who composed songs of praise and adoration of various kinds. Four of these, Chhitaswami, Govindaswami, Nandadasa and Chaturbhujadasa have attained celebrity for their contributions to the Hymnology of the Church. The second of these men, being a great musician of the times, was the leading singer in the temple of Sri Nathjee. Vitthalnatha was something of a painter too. A picture of his representing Navnita-Priyajee is still extant. The ladies of his family, besides, had talents for drawing and embroidery, which were requisitioned for decorating the temple on days of festivity. These designs are known by the names of those who made them.

In all likelihood Vitthalnatha built only one temple, which was that of Sri Nathjee after the Image came into his sole possession. We do not know what happened to the temple of this Image built by Purnamalla in the time of Vallabha. Whatever it be, the new temple built by Vitthalnatha was on a new plan altogether. It was more of a house than a temple proper. We do not know for certain why he did this, but there is no doubt that this has helped much in giving the worship of this Church some of its chief features. Very likely he built this shrine in this manner because he lived close to Delhi, the capital of a Moslem Empire. The possibility of a severe form of persecution, followed by a wanton destruction of temples, was always there. The temples, noted for any beauty or magnificence, were in special danger owing to the fanaticism of Moslem Princes. That Vitthalnatha was justified in his fears was amply proved by the events that took place under the rule of Aurangzebe, when the Image of Sri Nathjee had to be removed from the Vraja-land. If the persecution did not come



earlier, it was solely due to the exceptional character and toleration of the rule of Akbar and two of his successors.

Vitthalnatha may also have been led by another motive in building a house rather than a temple for the Image of Sri Nathjee. He may have well felt that the temples with their ceremonials etc., belonged to the old order or dispensation. They often overshadowed the Images installed in them, making the latter only a part of themselves. The Images therein were apt to lose their personality and to assume a character which was formal and rigid, and he wanted to avoid this at all costs. He may also have been guided by the idea that every act of public worship must be collective and congregational, which was not the case in temples.

The temple of Sri Nathjee, accordingly, was verily a house such as any big man might have in those days. It had various apartments for the use of the Deity such as *Bhoga-griha*, dining-room, *Shayana-griha*, sleeping-room, *Nija-mandir*, drawing-room, *Fula-griha*, flower-room, *Pana-griha*, betel-room etc. etc. The place of worship was in the central part of a big compound with some open space round about it. This central building was surrounded on all sides by houses meant for the attendants etc., of the Image. It is the plan of this building which has been generally followed in the construction of most of the *havelis* belonging to Vallabha's Church.

Another important activity of Vitthalnatha during this period was the creation of Literature. He had high literary gifts and was like his father a master of the Sanskrit language. His chief work was the completion of the *Anu Bhashya*, left unfinished by his father. His other works are *Vidvan-Mandana*, the Ornament of the Learned, *Vivritti-Prakasha*, a commentary on *Subodhinijee* etc. All these works show him to be an excellent expositor of his faith. We have dealt with his literary work at greater length elsewhere.

Vitthalnatha, besides doing all this work, continued his missionary activity. He had in his Church no Sadhus or Sannyasis who might be entrusted with the work of preaching the faith. This was indeed a serious lack and the Sampradaya has been suffering from it all through its history. It has been, however, a part of its life, so that it has not been conscious of it. Vitthalnatha tried to make up this deficiency by organising bands of amateur dramatists, whom he sent to different parts to give public representations of some of the episodes in the life of Krishna. This way of preaching the Gospel proved very effective in Gujarat, where whole communities joined the Church. The people of this Province had been too long under the influence of the negative teaching of both Jainism and Shankara Vedanta not to thirst for something positive. They are, besides, emotional in their temperament, owing to which the *Bhakti* element in the new teaching made a deep appeal to them.

It is extremely doubtful if Vitthalnatha would have been able to do so much work but for the fact that Akbar was at the helm of affairs in the Mogul Empire at that time. The peace established by the latter within a short time of his accession to the throne of Delhi, and the remarkable toleration shown by him towards all religions were of much help to the new faith. Akbar is rightly considered to be one of the greatest Emperors that not only India but the world has known, and the debt of this country to him for all the great and noble things he did is immense. It was largely due to the full religious freedom granted by him to the Hindus that the Sampradayas of both Vallabha and Chaitanya continued to live and grow at the most critical time in their existence. These were like tender plants when Akbar came to the throne, and they needed all the care and protection that could be given to them even for their existence. It is also doubtful if Tulsidas, the great author of the Ramayana in Hindi, would have been able to do his work, but for Akbar's rule. He was a contem-

porary of Akbar, his dates being 1532 to 1623 A. D., and his best work was done in Akbar's time.

Not only did Akbar grant full freedom to all the religions, but he extended his patronage to some of them. He did this in the case of Vallabha's movement. Vitthalnatha was fortunate in enlisting the sympathy of the Emperor for his cause. Two of the chief ministers of Akbar, Rajas Birbal and Todarmal, were his personal friends, and they came very near accepting the new faith if they did not do it altogether. It is said that Birbal was blessed by Vitthalnatha in Gadha in his younger days just before he set out for the north to try his fortune. The followers of this Church attribute his success and rise in life to this blessing. Whatever this be, both Birbal and Todarmal, who had much influence at the court of Akbar, did their best to help this Sampradaya. It was probably due to them that Akbar granted to Vitthalnatha several important privileges, which not only smoothened his path but helped much in the progress of his Church.

Akbar is said to have invited Vitthalnatha to his court and to have been much impressed by his noble bearing and high character. He then granted him full protection for his faith, issuing a special Farman, order, to that effect in 1577 A. D. This was followed by another in 1581 A. D., in which the Emperor gave permission to Vitthalnatha to graze his cows in all the lands, whether *Khalsa* or *Jagir*, near Gokula. This order was confirmed six months later by the mother of Akbar, which shows that the good name and fame of Vitthalnatha had reached even the zenana of the Mogul Court. The fourth Firman, issued in 1588 A. D., records the grant of some villages round about Gokula to Vitthalnatha. This was followed by another giving full security and protection to all "the buildings, gardens, cow-sheds and workshops for the temple of Govardhannatha," belonging to Vitthalnatha in 1593 A. D. It is interesting to note that it is in this order that Vitthalnatha is called Gosain (Goswami) for the first.

time. This estate spoken of as *Mowza* was given "tax-free" and "from descendant to descendant." No tax of any kind was to be levied henceforth on the lands possessed by Vitthalnatha and his successors. In 1593 A. D., an Imperial order was issued forbidding "the killing of peacocks and any kind of hunting" round about Mathura, Gokula etc. Another Firman issued in the same year settled upon "Vitthalnatha Goswami, in perpetuity, for the expenses of the Thakordwara (Idol-temple), the Mowzah of Gokula together with the Guzar Ghat in the paragana (district) of Mahavana," freeing them at the same time from all taxes whatsoever. These orders issued in such quick succession show in what respect Akbar held Vitthalnatha, and reflect much credit on both of them. If any Prince knew true greatness, it was Akbar.

This policy of giving full freedom of worship and even patronage to deserving religious leaders of all sects, initiated with so much wisdom by Akbar, was continued by his son Jahangir and grandson Shah Jahan. The last of these renewed all the above-mentioned titles to the land etc., in two Firmans, one issued in 1633 A. D., and the other in 1643 A. D. Dara, the eldest son of Shah Jahan, did the same again in 1647 and 1658 A. D., when he ruled the Empire in his father's name.

There is a large gap after this in the matter of the renewal of these titles, evidently due to the changed policy of Aurangzebe. In all probability the entire Vraja-land suffered heavily from the fanatical persecution of the Hindus under him and a number of temples were destroyed. Even the names of the places were changed. We learn this from a Firman issued by the Emperor Shah Alam in 1768 A. D., when there was evidently a return to the policy of Akbar. This order speaks of Gokula as Rasalapur and the names of the district and the province are given as Islamabad and Akbarabad respectively. Shah Alam bequeathed the village of Gokula and some land close to it, as a free gift to Murlidhar, one of the descendants of Vitthalnatha in 1758 A. D.



This was a gift to him and to all his descendants for all time. This title was confirmed by three Firmans issued in 1758, 1771 and 1773 A. D. respectively. When the British Government came to be established in Delhi, it confirmed again these Firmans. Lord Lake in an order issued in 1805 forbade the slaughter of cows round about Mathura. Since that time, the family of Vitthalnatha are in possession of the land mentioned above.

The Church of Vallabha was thus able to secure the goodwill and protection of a number of Mogul Emperors, which was the luckiest thing that could happen to it. It is doubtful if it could have grown in the way it did under a hostile rule. The foundations of these good relations were laid by both Vitthalnatha and Akbar, with Birbal and Todarmal acting as intermediaries. These ministers of Akbar were frequent visitors to the shrine of Sri Nathjee, and their relations with Vitthalnatha were extremely cordial. It is said that even Akbar visited the shrine in the Vraja-land. Mr. Telivala, a noted scholar of this Church, says the following about the matter:

“Akbar some times did pay visits to Vitthaleshwara, who made an exception in the case of the Emperor by allowing him the *darshana* i. e. the sight of the Image. A Sampradayic Gatha records the following incident of Akbar's visit on one Sharda Purnima, the full-moon night in the month of Asho. Krishna is the symbol of the highest Rasa Sringara. He is described as *shyama* (dark). Accordingly everything in the *Seva* (service) was naturally of a light dark colour. This was changed to white silver cloth at Akbar's request, and this practice continues to this day.”

Vitthalnatha had, during about two decades of his stay in Gokula, set his work on a sound footing, and being now well advanced in years, he yearned to renounce the world. This was in accordance with the well-known principle and practice of the



Hindus to enter into the fourth Ashrama, the stage of life, known as *Sannyasashrama*. He had fulfilled most of his duties to his family and to the greater household of faith entrusted to his care by God. He knew that the end of his sojourn in this world was in sight, and he wanted to be fully prepared to meet it in a worthy manner. He had, besides, his father's example before him. Accordingly, one day after the mid-day service was over, he went into the garden attached to his house and began to colour his clothes with the orange colour suited to this new stage of life. Seeing this some of his disciples came to him and said: "We do not know Sri Nathjee, we know you; therefore whatever you do, we too shall do. In that case you should not find fault with us. To tell the truth, to take to such a life is not proper or necessary for you." All this and much more was said to him by them with such deep anguish of heart that Vitthalnatha took it as a command of God for him not to enter the *Sannyasashrama*. He, however, gave up the use of several things which were not strictly necessary to the maintenance of life, observed silence as much as possible and gave utterance to the name of God habitually.

Vitthalnatha was blessed with a numerous family. By his first wife Rukhmani, he had nine sons and as many daughters. Of these three sons and five daughters had passed away during his life-time. By his second wife Padmavati he had only one son. All his sons except perhaps the youngest had been married now and some of them had children of their own. His daughters were married too. The marriage of the latter was a difficult problem, and the way in which Vitthalnatha solved it shows his extreme zeal for his faith. Inter-caste marriage was unthinkable in those days. A step of this kind was impossible to take in any community that based its faith on the Vedas. Any body of people violating the Varnashrama Dharma were considered heterodox. Under the circumstances what Vitthalnatha could do was to bring the brides for his sons from his own community wherever it was and to give his daughters in marriage in the same.

This was an exceedingly difficult task in those days of slow traffic and much insecurity to life and property in travel. He was a Telugu Brahmin who lived far away from his community. It would also mean the loss of his daughters to his Church, for they would have to be married necessarily out of it. He, therefore, solved the problem by making connections with a Brahmin community of his own part of the country which had settled down in the kingdom of Rani Durgavati. He came to know these people while he was there and had taken his second wife from them. After the destruction of Gadha, he invited them to Vraja-land and adopted the community as his own. It was to some of the boys from this caste that he married his daughters. This is how he managed to keep them in his Church. He made suitable provision for these Brahmins called Bhattas by appointing them as priests or rather chief worshippers in the *havelis* that came into existence in course of time. An exception to this was made in the case of those *havelis* which belonged to his own family, in which the Bhattas are not allowed to enter the innermost part of the sanctuary. This has resulted in the Bhattas setting up *havelis* of their own wherever they could. This proved helpful to the growth of the Church. They became, thus, missionaries of the new faith. We might add that even for this step viz., intermarrying with the Bhattas, on the part of Vitthalnatha, the strictly orthodox Brahmins have considered his family to have lost their caste.

All the accounts available agree in showing Vitthalnatha to be a man of exemplary character. He had assimilated his father's teaching in his life to the extent of becoming a living embodiment thereof. His relations with the followers of his faith were extremely tender and cordial. He looked upon them as his brothers and sisters or children, and they in their turn lavished upon him their love and respect. The number of these had increased much during the course of his ministry, which is in itself a high tribute to his deep devotion and noble character. He had succeeded in consolidating and expanding the Church of his father to such an extent

that he is spoken of as the Founder of the New Way as much as Vallabha. He is also looked upon as one in whom the feminine type of spiritual life, the Gopi-type of devotion, had been realized to the fullest extent. The tenderness associated with women at their best was in him, and it reflected itself in all his relationships with people. His domestic life was ideal under circumstances which would have made it difficult for most men to have a happy home. He had several sons and daughters, and two of his brother's daughters, both of them widowed, lived with him. His sons and daughters were married and some of them had children of their own. To manage so big a household is an extremely difficult task, and to make it a harmonious whole is still more so. Not only did Vitthalnatha succeed in doing this to the fullest extent, but he is said to have impressed the character of his faith deeply on every member of his family. Indeed, his was an ideal Vaishnava household. His extreme love for every member of his vast family and especially the little ones was the fruit of his devotion to God. One of the most beautiful testimonies to his *Bhakti* for God and tenderness towards all and especially children, is given by one of his grand-children, Devkinandana. He has left it on record that Vitthalnatha, while fondling him with maternal tenderness, used to repeat again and again the words *Sri Krishna sharnam mama*, May Krishna be my Refuge.

The love of Vitthalnatha for children and for the members of his family was a reflection of his Vatsalya Bhakti. Before leaving this world, he gave to each of his sons an Image of the Deity as his portion in life. Some of these Images were those originally consecrated by Vallabha and given to his disciples. They had been returned to Vitthalnatha after the death of their respective owners. The shrine of Sri Nathjee was given to his eldest son as his exclusive possession, but all the sons had the right to perform the *Seva* of the Deity therein. It is these Images, given to his sons, that have the primacy of place, albeit after that of Sri Nathjee, in the Church over all others. Much of the

history of Vallabha's Church since the time of Vitthalnatha has revolved and grown round them. They came to be known as *Nidhis*, Oceans, and they have been, indeed, a source of much wealth, power and prestige to their owners, not always to their spiritual advantage. Each of the sons of Vitthalnatha set up a shrine of his own, which has now come to be known as a *Gadi*, seat or episcopate. Vitthalnatha built, besides, separate houses for them, except for the youngest who, being a minor, was put under the care of the eldest son. This led to some difficulty later on.

The work of Vitthalnatha was now finished in as complete a manner as it is possible for that of any man to be. He was a boy when his father passed away leaving a faith and a Church which had hardly begun their existence. During the course of a ministry extending over more than half a century, he made this Church a strong and flourishing body with several important features of its own. He made ample provision for its future expansion by furnishing it with the example of his life and making necessary arrangements. He had now reached the ripe old age of seventy years and had, moreover, the satisfaction of having served God and large numbers of men and women given to him by God as members of His Household to the best of his ability. Indeed his was a rich life, rich in the best sense of the term. Now that his mission was fulfilled in such a noble manner, he was called home by God on the seventh day of the dark half of the month of Maha in Samvata 1642 ( 1586 A. D. ). So far as Vallabha's Church is concerned, his place is second only to that of its founder.

"We have reserved one important question concerning Vitthalnatha's life and work for discussion until now. This is in regard to the influence, direct or indirect, on his mind at any stage of his life by the Church of Chaitanya. We had felt without any adequate data before us that there was some influence of this kind at work in his life, and it was a matter of glad surprise to us that



Mr. Telivala, than whom there have been few people better qualified to speak on a matter of this kind, had arrived at the same conclusion. This is what he writes in connection with it:

“In the year Samvata 1616 ( 1560 A. D. ), Vitthalnatha visited the shrine of Jagannatha in Puri. He was then accompanied by his wife and eldest son. He stayed there for nearly six months. After witnessing the Rathotsava, the Car-Festival at Puri, he seems to have returned to Adel. During his visit to Puri he had taken with him a carpenter Rasa by name. This was with a view to see the model of the Jagannatha car. It is said that when Vitthaleshwar returned to Adel, he got a car prepared of a similar model and took his Deity round the village of Adel in a procession. During his stay at Gadha also he celebrated a Rathotsava similarly. During his stay in Jagannatha, Vitthaleshwar came in contact with the immediate followers of Chaitanya living there. It is possible that the composition of *Swaminityastaka*, *Swaministotra* and several other minor *stotras* ( Psalms ), in which the eternal consort Radha of Sri Krishna is extolled, date from this period; or their composition may be due to the direct or indirect influence of Chaitanya's Saints. There is no *stotra* or writing of Vallabhacharya to our knowledge where Radha is extolled in the strain in which Vitthaleshwar has done. How far and how much of this influence was retained by Vitthaleshwar it is difficult for us to determine from the materials available, though the conclusion of *Anu-Bhashya* where Navanita-Priya and Govardhana-dhara only are mentioned would show that Vitthaleshwar in later times had completely freed himself from the Chaitanya's influence. His commentary on *Krishna-premamrita* and *Sringar-rasa-mandana* may be due to Chaitanya mould of thought.”

We must add here what Mr. Telivala wrote in the paragraph immediately following the above, especially as it qualifies to some extent the statement made therein :



“ Or that was the time when the wave of Radha-Krishna worship swept over the whole of India, and it would be difficult to say exactly how far the influence of Chaitanya thought there is in the above *Stotras*. The originality of thought and expression are Vitthaleshwar's own. We would not be wrong if the composition of the above *Stotras* was assigned to this period. It is possible that these *Stotras* are due to Saraswati Samvada and nothing else.”

Elsewhere Mr. Telivala says that Vitthalnatha left “all traces of Chaitanya's thought” which he had brought with him from his visit to Jagannatha as a result of the bitterness that sprang up between his Church and that of Sri Chaitanya over the possession of the shrine of Sri Nathjee in Samvata 1629 (1573 A. D.).

We might add here that there is nothing wrong in one's receiving such an influence. Some people are needlessly sensitive in regard to such matters. They think it derogatory to their Church for it to have been influenced in any manner by another Church. We, on the other hand, are of the opinion that a receptivity of this kind on the part of a leader of thought or religious life shows him sometimes to greater advantage. For one thing, it shows that he is teachable, living and vital. We gave expression to this thought in our book *Brahmarshi Keshub Chunder Sen* in regard to the influence that he received from Ram-Krishna Paramhansa, and Romain Rolland, in his biography of the latter, not only confirmed us in this matter but said that he had come independently to the same conclusion. There is nothing like absolute originality in this world, and very often the greater a man is, the more ready he is to receive new light from any quarter. True greatness lies in this receptivity and not in closing one's eyes to everything but what he churlishly considers his own. Vitthalnatha would not be human, using the term in the sense in which it shows man at his best, if he did not receive some such influence from a body of people who were so akin to him in thought and

life. The Chaitanya Sampradaya, though it started at about the same time as that of Vallabha, was full-fledged when Vitthalnatha's powers were growing and coming to their maturity. Moreover this Sampradaya had its headquarters in Vrandavana, which was only next door to Gokula, the home of Vitthalnatha. It is true the relations between the two Churches were strained after the quarrel over the shrine of Sri Nathjee. After that event took place, each went its own way, one eastward and the other westward, with a strict delimitation of frontiers and spheres of influence between them. This did not necessarily eliminate all connection between them. They had now become rival Churches and people imitate one another as much from antagonism as from friendship. Under these circumstances it is more than probable that the title *Goswami*, which Vitthalnatha took for himself later in his life, was taken from the Church of Chaitanya, where it had been already in use for its leaders. The same is true probably of the term *Mahaprabhujee*, the great Lord, used for Vallabha. It was already used for Chaitanya by his followers. It carried with it a new understanding of the place of Vallabha in his Church with far-reaching consequences in its train. Vallabha had called himself Krishnadas, a servant of Krishna, and had rejoiced in the title. His son now spoke of him as "Krishna himself", and we wonder if that change also was due to the example of the rival Church, which had long since begun to look upon Chaitanya as an Incarnation of Krishna. Whatever all this be, the two Sampradayas lived too close to each other for some influence not to have passed from one to the other.

Mr. Telivala makes another statement which, if based on fact, shows how Vitthalnatha deepened the faith of his father in a most practical manner. We have already referred to the formula used while giving initiation or *Brakmasambandha*. This *mantra* was short and may mean anything from a mere conventional phrase to an absolute surrender to God. Because of this Vitthalnatha felt it necessary to bring out all its implications at the time of the ceremony so that the initiated person might know what was

expected of him or her. In regard to this Mr. Telivala says the following:

“ The initiation of the Vaishnavas was a very simple formula, as Vallabhacharya puts it somewhere in his Subodhini, viz., *Krishna, I am Thine*. This would seem to be the ordinary mode of initiation as communicated to him by Lord Krishna. But for the practical purposes of the Sampradaya, some solemn declaration was a necessity, and hence we feel it is possible that the language used in the explanation incorporated in the *Gadya* ( Prose ), is the work of Sri Vitthaleshwara. For the Sampradaya which was expanding in all directions, some grave and solemn declaration appeared to Vitthaleshwara to be a necessity, and he, without adding to or subtracting anything from the sense of *Krishna, I am thine*, added a solemn declaration by which the sense of the *Mantra*, formula, became abundantly clear. The Sampradayikas do understand that the portion of the *Gadya* preceding *Krishna, I am Thine*, is explanatory of the same. This being an explanation coming from Vitthaleshwara accounts for the difference in the readings of the formula among his seven sons. This change was most essential as it added to the solemnity of the initiation ceremony. ”

The *Gadya* or the prose interpretation of the initiation formula stands thus:

“ Sri Krishna is my Protector. I, who have lost my original joy, owing to the troubles and miseries caused by my separation from Sri Krishna, now surrender with all my spirit and soul to Sri Krishna, the Beloved of the Gopis, my body, my senses, my life and mind and all that pertain to them, together with my wife, family and property. O Krishna, I am Thy servant.”

It may well be that as the Church began to expand, it was found necessary to give a more definite meaning to the original *mantra*. Vitthalnatha could not go everywhere and meantime

Vaishnavas were rising in numbers. Not only were new disciples coming in but there was an addition of members by natural increase in the families of the older believers. All these people had to be given some sort of initiation if they were to be kept in the Church. Accordingly it seems they were given at first the original *mantra*, which signified their admission into the Church. It is quite possible that this was given even by laymen. We know for certain from the literature of the Church that Chacha Harivamsha was sent by Vitthalnatha to different parts and especially to Gujarata on a sort of missionary tour, and that he administered the vow to many people. He is said to have converted even the Bhils to the new faith and given them not only the name but even the Seva, which represents the higher stage of initiation. If he did this, others also may have been allowed or authorised to do so. Mr. Telivala says : "In the known writings of Vallabhacharya it is nowhere mentioned that this initiation should take place only through him or his descendants. Vallabhacharya does not seem to insist that any particular person should initiate you. Of course it goes without saying that the person who initiates and the person initiated must be spiritually exalted."

It is also likely that some of the people initiated in this way by laymen were ready for a further step in their religious life, and the vow in its expanded form was administered to them. Even this may have been done by some eminent Vaishnavas at first, but more usually it was done by Vitthalnatha whenever it was possible for him to do so. In course of time both these vows or initiations came to be administered by the descendants of Vitthalnatha, and to-day this privilege rests exclusively with them. The first is called *Sharanmantropdesha* and the second *Atmanivedana*. By receiving the first vow, the disciple becomes a member of the Church and the second confers upon him the right of worship or service of an Image. The second is *Brahmasambandha* proper and it carries with it certain responsibilities which all the Vaishnavas of this Church are not prepared to under-

-take. The first initiation is given even to a child while the second requires some kind of understanding on the part of the neophyte of the vow which he takes. It may be added here that both these vows are administered in the name of the Acharya, and that he is no other than Vallabha himself. He is supposed to be spiritually present, and those who give the initiation are strictly speaking known only as *Gurudwaras*, the way or door to the Guru, and nothing more.



## CHAPTER II

### Gokulnatha

Gokulnatha, the fourth son of Vitthalnatha was the ablest of all. By the time he came to maturity, the movement of Vallabha had established itself well in Western India, especially in Mewad, Marwar and Gujarata. It was now growing in size daily, a matter which caused much alarm to the orthodox protagonists of the Vedic faith. There were many reasons for this keen antagonism towards it on the part of the leaders of orthodoxy. The Church of Vallabha had, in the eyes of these, committed a grave offence by giving to the Bhagavata Purana the place of primacy among the Scriptures. This Purana was accepted by all the Hindus including the most orthodox as a sacred book, but it was far from their mind to make it so central as was done by the New Church. The Church of Vallabha, besides, had given much offence by its almost total repudiation of *Karmas*, or ritualistic duties and works. It had also trespassed against the *Varnashrama Dharma*, the socio-religious hierarchy, by refusing to recognise the Brahmin and the Sannyasi as superior to others. All this and much more made the new movement an eyesore to the leaders of orthodox Hindu society and made them look upon it with feelings of deep aversion and antagonism. In their eyes it was anything but orthodox and was denounced openly as positively heterodox, which was a serious charge.

This antagonism found a powerful voice in the person of a Sannyasin called Chidrupa. He seems to have been a person of some importance, for he had some influence at the court of Jahangir, the Emperor of Delhi. Very likely he possessed some occult powers which were feared and respected even by the Emperor himself. This man was convinced of the heterodoxy of the new faith, and he made it a mission of his life to root it out. Accordingly he began to persecute the followers of Vallabha with the help of some leading men of the Hindu public and a few officers of the State. The persecution became so severe that a few people even apostatised. For some time the danger to the Church of Vallabha was so great that it made many people fear for its very existence. It was at this stage that Gokulnatha came forward and defied Chidrupa to do his worst. He put new courage into the heart of the Vaishnavas, and went to see the Emperor himself as far as Kashmere, where the latter was, to seek his protection. Jahangir was well impressed by him and passed orders that the members of the new faith were to be allowed to profess and practise their faith with full freedom. The persecution ended thus with a victory for Gokulnatha. This was the first great crisis through which the new faith had to pass, and Gokulnatha has been looked upon ever since as its Protector and Saviour.

The charge of heterodoxy has been brought against this Church again and again by the leaders of what is called the Sanatana Dharma. This has not resulted, however, in any active persecution. There are several reasons for this. The Moslem ascendancy in the parts of India where this movement flourished had so changed the face of everything that Hindu solidarity had come to be valued more than anything else. In the face of a common enemy, the Hindus had neither time nor desire to persecute one another. It was different in South India. The religious movements of both Ramanuja and Madhva, which had far more in common with the old forms of the Hindu or Vedic faith than that of

Vallabha, had been persecuted very severely there because Hinduism was the only religion prevailing among the people.

Another reason for the lack of severe persecution of Vallabha's Church lay in the fact that it did not violate the Varnashram Dharma in any open manner. It is true it gave a subsidiary position to the conventions of this Dharma, but there was no open breach made therein, and so long as this is not done, it is difficult to challenge the orthodox character of any religious movement. Provided a body of people maintain the rules of the Caste-system, it can have all the liberty it wants in its religious thought. This has been true even with such people as the Jains, whose faith is entirely non-Vedic. In all probability, the existence of the Jains in large numbers in the parts where the Church of Vallabha was spreading made matters smoother than would have been the case otherwise. Jainism had brought with it an elasticity in the socio-religious system, which benefited the new movement in many ways. It had, besides, educated the people into the principles and practice of non-violence to such an extent that violent persecution of any religious body was enough to lower and condemn its persecutors as worse than heterodox in the eyes of the general public. Whatever this be, active persecution of the Sampradaya of Vallabha at the hands of the Sanatani Hindus ceased with the efforts of Chidrupa to destroy this movement.

Gokulnatha, besides being a man of action, was something of an original religious teacher. In this matter, the mantle of his father and grand-father had fallen on his shoulders. Besides winning a victory over the opponents of his faith, he did much to consolidate it in many ways. He wrote commentaries on some of the books of Vallabha as has been mentioned elsewhere. He had, besides, a hand in the writing of some of the biographical works on Vallabha. In these and other ways he carried further the work of his father and helped much in the spread of the movement. So outstanding was his personality that he has been considered the third great leader of the Church by its followers.

The most significant part of Gokulnatha's work lay in his oral teaching. He was probably the first among the leaders of the Vallabha Sampradaya to use the vernacular for such a purpose on a large scale. He had, besides, a large number of disciples whom he led step by step into the higher teaching of his faith. Much of the pioneering work was already done by Vallabha and Vitthalnatha, and now that comparative rest was secured after his own fight with Chidrupa, Gokulnatha was free to devote himself to the work of teaching in which he seems to have been perfectly at home. He had a remarkable insight into the doctrines of his faith and he taught these in as simple a manner as possible. The new teaching was losing its Sanskritic and as such superior character and was being naturalised for the first time among the people who had accepted it. The form that it assumed in his hands is that of what is called table-talk, or sayings, or *Vachanamrita*, the number of which is said to have been nearly fifteen thousand. A small part of these have been published so far, but they are enough to show him to be a man of profound knowledge and insight into the things of the spirit. These reveal, besides, an extraordinary common sense, and so full are they of a subtle wit and humour that they are spoken of as Humorous Sayings. He, thus, made humour an integral part of his teaching, which was a new feature not only in his own faith but in much of Hinduism. This was in virtue of his attaining to a high level of wisdom as distinguished from knowledge and of integrity of life.

Of these *Vachanamritas* of his, we intend to give here some as samples to show the character of his teaching and the type of person he was. Here is one:

"Once upon a time Sri Gokulesha was sitting with some of his disciples when Kalyana Bhatta requested him to tell them how the attainment of God was possible. To this he replied that God could be attained not by our own means or works i. e. *Sadhanas*, but by His own grace. Then Kalyana Bhatta asked him as to how this grace of God was given. He replied:



“ God at first keeps one whom He favours in His town: next He gives him the company of those who are His friends. This is taking him to His house. After this God has intimate union with him. He then tells him His inmost thoughts. After this grace changes the nature of the devotee altogether. God then keeps him in his pleasure-house, never letting him go therefrom.”

Kalyana Bhatta then requested him to make these things clearer which was done as follows:

“ The town of God is the companionship of the devotees of God who follow the *Rasa-Marga*, the Path of Devotion in which love and joy are all in all. This is the real Gokula. The house in which God lives is the grace of such devotees as are mentioned above. When God keeps one in the grace of these devotees always, we may know that He has kept him in His house. The friend of God is one whom God gives the experience of His own inmost love-joy. It is through these friends that one sees God with one's eyes. What are the eyes? The eyes are the ears with which one hears the story of God's love-joy from the mouth of such friends. Here it is the ear which is the eye, and not the eye proper. What we hear we understand, which is seeing. The pleasure-haunt of God where He takes His devotees is *Sarvalma-bhava*, which is seeing and experiencing God everywhere. When the devotee experiencing God in this way perspires with emotion, he is said to have bathed. This means the washing away of all his sins. When through still greater emotion, the devotee's hairs stand on their end he has had intimate union with God. This is supernatural Sringara, divine devotion in the form of sex-love or its archetype. When the devotee's throat becomes full of tenderness and tender words come out from his mouth, then God is said to have talked with him His inmost secrets. When all the members of the body of the devotee tremble with emotion, God is playing with him. The experience of supreme joy on the part of the devotee shows that his spirit has undergone transformation and



that he has been gifted with the divine spirit. When the devotee sheds tears again and again, we may know that God has finished His play with him. Now if the devotee remains in this pleasure-haunt and experiences the same joy in the same way again and again, we might know that he has attained God."

The following is another saying on the same subject:

Once Kalyana Bhatta said that the path of grace as taught by Vallabhacharya was very difficult to follow. Under the circumstances he asked as to how God could be attained at once. To this Gokulnatha replied thus:

"It is God Himself who makes it possible for the devotee to attain Him. There is a path prescribed for this, and if one walks along it, he attains God. As for this path, it is entirely different from the one which the people of the world use. The true devotees walk in dense forests where none else can go: they walk on high mountains which the ordinary people can not ascend: they walk in water which drowns ordinary people: they walk on air which is out of the reach of other people: they walk on swords which would cut the feet of others: they walk on fire which would burn ordinary people."

On being asked by Kalyana Bhatta to make the meaning of these things plainer, Gokulnatha replied:

"The people of the world glorify themselves and minimise the worth of others, while the devotees of God act contrary to this altogether.

"As for walking on the mountains, it is this. The people of the world rarely acknowledge the benefits they receive from others. On the other hand the devotees are full of gratefulness, and even if they have received an ever so little benefit from others, they think and speak of it as invaluable."

"Walking in water is this: with ordinary people the rule is that if any devotee of God comes to them and asks for anything,

they refuse this demand. On the other hand the devotee of God never does this even though he may be asked to give anything.

“ Walking on air is this: people of the world do the will of their relations but rarely of the devotees of God, which latter if they do at all, it is for some personal gain that may occur to them from it. The devotee of God on the other hand tries first to do the will of those who like himself are devoted to God. He does this to the limit, and in such a way as not to let any one know about it, and believing himself at the same time to have done nothing.

“ The devotee of God may be said to walk on the edge of the sword when he tries to please and satisfy not only those who are devotees like himself, but even the least little ones.

“ Walking on fire is this: the devotee of God never feels proud even though he may get riches. He always attributes everything to the grace of God and thinks himself to be unworthy of it. He is always humble. On the other hand the man of the world swells in pride with everything that he gets.”

Asked as to how it was possible to walk on a path so difficult to follow, Gokulnatha said:

“ When God knows that a devotee of His desires to come to Him, He is pleased, and He spreads His own hands on the paths described above. This makes it easy for the devotee to walk on air, fire etc. The same is done again by the chief devotees for the lesser ones.”

The following is another saying of Gokulnatha. Asked as to how God can be attained, he said:

“ The attainment of God is possible by the worship of God's devotees.”

He was then told that though many people served the devotees, they were far from attaining God. He was then requested to define what the worship and service of the devotees of God meant, to which he replied thus:

“Most of those people who worship and serve the devotees do so with a view to attaining some benefit therefrom. There is some selfishness in this, which makes it impossible for them to have the final beatitude. Those who worship and serve without attachment of any kind, without any desire for gain, but with the sole view of making such service the end in itself, attain God. In true worship there is no give and take, which is of the world worldly.”

The allegorical form of teaching seen in these and many other Sayings is peculiar to Gokulnatha. It brings home the teachings of his Church to the ordinary people in a manner which is at once simple and stimulating. There are many Sayings which are aphoristic in character. They condense much thought in a single sentence or two, which are striking both for substance and style. Gokulnatha, besides, draws a number of illustrations from ordinary life, especially in the realm of love, wherein a wife or mistress gives up her life when separated from her husband or lover, to show the true character of loving devotion to God.

We might well give here one or two Sayings of the aphoristic kind.

Once upon a time Gokulnatha said that to the *Bhagavadiya* i. e. the true devotee, both hell and heaven were the same. On being asked how this was possible, he said that to such a devotee there is no question of his going to hell, and that as for heaven he has not the least desire to go there: this makes both of them equal.”

Here is another:

“Once when asked as to what constituted *nihsadhanta*, ( the state of life in which means have no place and which is the true poverty of spirit), he said that it meant a condition of the soul in which it felt certain that it had no other means but the loving God and had no eye to anything else but the loving God.”

One more:

“At the time when the persecution started by Chidrupa was in full swing, somebody said that it was a most difficult time and that none knew how it would end. To this Gokulnatha replied that one must bear whatever came to him. The man then said that it was blowing so hard that pieces of stone were thrown about. Gokulnatha replied that however strong a tempest might be, it might carry stones but not mountains.”

Here is another:

“Once there was a talk of the four Vaishnava Sampradayas, viz., those of Ramanuja, Madhva, Nimbarka and Vallabha, when some one said that the Path shown by the last was wonderful. Then Gokulnatha said that it was not a Path, but the Goal itself.”

An important element in the teaching of Gokulnatha is the very high place he gives to the *Bhagvadiyas*, the true devotees of God, in what may be called the spiritual hierarchy of the new faith. A number of Sayings are devoted to this subject, and it seems that in his eyes these alone are the true *Gurus*, teachers. The characteristics of the true devotees of God he describes as follows:

“These are full of the vision of God in their mind, body and word. They always think and work for the good of all the devotees of God, superior, ordinary and inferior, just as in the world people do for themselves and for those whom they look upon as their own. They believe an atom of good in devotees to be as great as a mountain. They are always merciful, showing mercy to others all the time. They are never affected by the pride of wealth. If any devotee comes to them for any thing, they give it to him according to their ability and with much joy in their hearts. Woe to the man who thinks at such times that the man who wants something from him has come to cheat him! The true devotee does not even wait to be asked, for he gives of his own accord seeing the need and

the desire of other devotees. He does not let these feel the humiliation of asking for a favour: such a thing would be a sin for him. If a man does not hasten to fulfil the need and desire of devotees, he is a burden on the earth. The true devotee never strays from his path for love of woman, which is a kind of delirium for most people: nor does he ever glorify himself before those who are swollen with pride of wealth that they hoard for the protection of their life, which is as transient as the dew on the grass. He looks upon honour and fame as dirt, though even those who leave all fall a prey to these things. Such a devotee has *Sarvatmabhava*: he loves God with all his mind, heart, soul and strength, and is ever desirous to attain the lotus-feet of God. He always desires to sanctify his head with the dust of the feet of devotees who have attained fellowship with God, looking upon himself as a sinful being."

We are sorry we can not give more of these Sayings here for want of space, although they make excellent reading and are characteristic of the man. They contain the essence of the doctrine of the Vaishnavism of Vallabha put in a pithy and arresting manner. They show Gokulnatha to be an original religious teacher who dared to go beyond his father and grandfather, and even the Scriptures including the Bhagavata at times. He had realized the doctrine of love to such an extent that he experienced the full liberty of those who love.

In these Sayings Gokulnatha is addressed as a Guru in the highest sense of the term according to the Hindus, i. e. as one who is an Incarnation of God. Probably he was the first to be addressed in this way on a large scale by the members of his Church, and it seems that the Vaishnavas of his time looked upon him alone of all the sons of Vitthalnatha in this manner. His descendants even to-day claim for themselves a special privilege, not recognised by other branches of the family. Very likely the practice of looking upon the descendants of Vallabha as incarnations of God began with Gokulnatha and his immediate successors. Whatever this



be, it is undoubted that Gokulnatha was in every way a worthy successor of Vitthalnatha and Vallabha.

Gokulnatha had six brothers, three of whom were older than himself and three younger. By his talents, strength of character and high spirituality, he overshadowed all of them easily, and the leadership of the Church may well have rested with him especially as the times were stormy and the movement was going through persecution. This resulted in many Vaishnavas looking upon him as the only true successor of his father. Since then the descendants of Gokulnatha and their disciples have formed a group by themselves and they are distinguished from other Vaishnavas by some slight differences in the wording of the initiation formula and in the *tilak*, the mark on the forehead. The Vaishnavas belonging to this body may be in number about twenty thousands according to the information given to us by a prominent Vaishnava belonging to the general body.

In course of time a group of people separated themselves again from the body of believers in Gokulnatha. We have not seen any of these people and our information about them is entirely second-hand. It seems they do not recognise any member of the family of Gokulnatha as their *Guru* merely because he is such, and they take their initiation from Vaishnavas whom they might look upon as spiritually qualified to give the same. They are also more thorough-going in their denial of ritualistic works and ceremonies. It seems those who branched off from the body of believers in Gokulnatha had set before themselves the ideal of putting into practice the doctrine of Grace preached by Vallabha in as full a manner as possible. They carried it in some respects to its logical conclusion. We do not know if there has been any falling off from this high ideal or set-back as is inevitable in almost every movement. These people are known as Bharuchi Vaishnavas, and their number may be anything between five and ten thousands.

## CHAPTER III

### Literature in Sanskrit

One of the noblest services rendered by Vallabha to India in general and his Church in particular was the creation of great and worthy literature. The seed sown by him grew in course of time into a mighty tree that may well cause wonder to the student of religion. So large is the volume of this literature that it has been described as being "greater in extent than that of the Chaitanya sect itself." We do not know how far this remark is true since we know very little of the latter. The man who makes this statement is the author of a small biography of Vallabha, appearing in the book *From Ramananda to Rama Tirtha*,\* and since he does not seem to be a follower of Vallabha, what he says in this connection has a value of its own. Whatever it be, there is no doubt that this Church is rich in its literature, and much of it is of so fine a quality that it deserves better recognition from the public than what it has had so far.

The number of books written by the followers of Vallabha is so large that it is not possible for us to describe or even to mention all of them here. Some of them are still unpublished and a number of MSS are irrevocably lost. All that we can do here is to draw a rough outline of this literature, touching only the high-lights thereof.

We have already described in some detail the books written by Vallabha in a chapter by itself. In another chapter we have

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\* This is a publication of G. A. Natesan & Co., Madras.

described the literary activities of some of his disciples, especially his *Sakhas* or friends. From his time there started thus a two-fold literary activity, one in Sanskrit and the other in Vraja-bhasa, and the same has continued ever since. Happily for Vallabha and his movement, there were among his successors a number of men of real genius, who devoted their time to the creation of literature. It is doubtful if any family in the history of the entire world has produced so much literature, within a period of two or three centuries as that of his. Most of this literature is in Sanskrit and it lies within well-defined limits. A large part of it is in the form of commentaries on the books written by Vallabha. It is amazing that so much should have been written at a time when printing was unknown and there was every chance of MSS being lost. The writers of these books must have supreme self-confidence as regards the value of what they wrote, and they trusted Providence to take care of their writings. This trust of theirs has been amply justified by what has happened since. These books in the form of MSS were subject to innumerable vicissitudes of time and accident. Even Vallabha's own works suffered from them as we learn from the following words of Mr. Telivala:

‘When the helm of the Sampradaya came into the hands of Vitthaleshwara, it was a problem to him as to how he should get authentic texts of his father's works. On the side of Adel counter-influences were working, and it was difficult, if not impossible, to get all the works. He seems to have secured the original copy of the *Brahma-Sutra Bhashya* of his father up to 3-2-34. *Nibandha* seems to have been secured by him, and he has attempted to finish *Prakasha* on *Nibandha* by writing commentaries on the fourth *Skandha* (book), and a portion of the fifth *Skandha* of the *Bhagvatartha-Prakarana*. From Vaishnava Rana Vyas of Gujarata, he secured the *Subodhini*, a commentary on *Srimad Bhagavata* by Vallabhacharya. We have no materials to know whether he got the *Purva-Mimansa Bhashya* of Vallabhacharya, though there is plenty of evidence in *Anu-Bhashya* to show his great hold on the Sutras

of Jaimini, to whom he refers as a master. It is possible as Purshotamjee says, that this Bhashya was lost in his times. We may infer from this that Vitthalesvara might have been in possession of the *Purva Mimansa Bhashya* of Sri Vallabhacharya, which became lost to us during the period of inter-regnum, between 1642 and 1724 Samvata. Thus it would seem that Vitthalesvara had before him almost all the works of his father which are now available to us."

We see from this how Vallabha's own works were not safe from the danger of being lost altogether. One reason for this was that after his death, when the succession was under dispute between Vitthalnatha and the young son of Gopinatha, the mother of the boy took away with her all the MSS of Vallabha. Some of these were in all probability lost. Besides, some MSS were lost in a fire that took place at Adel about the time of Vallabha's death. A few copies of most of his works were, however, in existence here and there, and they were secured by Vitthalnatha. Had it not been for him, who was as zealous as his father in the propagation of the new faith, probably all of them would have been lost, and there would have been no Sampradaya of Vallabha. Fortunately, Providence took care of the seed that was sown by Itself, and a rich harvest came to be gathered therefrom.

One of the most important literary tasks taken in hand by Vitthalnatha soon after he had settled down at Gokula was to finish *Anu-Bhashya*, the commentary on the Brahma-Sutras. He did this work well with the result that the book is now a finished whole. Because of this joint-authorship, the title Acharya is sometimes used with reference to both the father and the son. Vitthalnatha wrote, besides, a kind of running commentary on Subodhini, especially on the difficult portions thereof. This book is called *Vivriti-Prakasha*. He wrote also small commentaries on some of the minor works of his father.

Vitthalnatha, being a true poet, composed several *Stotras*, Hymns of Praise and Adoration, which are full of deep devotion.

The names of some of these are *Sri Sarvottamjee*, *Sri Vallabha-staka*, *Lalita Tribhangi Stotra*, *Yamunastapadi*, *Bhujangprayatastaka*, *Sri Gokuleshastotra*, *Sri Swaministotra*, *Sri Swaminiyastaka*, *Sfurat-Krishna Premamrita stotra etc., etc.*

He wrote two books, *Bhakti Hamsa* and *Bhakti-Hetu*, in which he explained the principles of Pusti-Marga. These were written at the instance of one of his followers, Morari Pundit, who requested him to give him something written, which might help him to give an effective answer to the objections raised against the new way. *Vidvana-Mandana*, The Ornament of the Learned, is a prose work of his in which he ably controverts the Mayavada of Shankara.

One of his great works is known by the name of *Vijnapti*, Prayers. It is hardly proper to call it a work, for it is a collection of prayers addressed to Sri Nathjee during the course of a number of months. He is said to have written these in the form of letters to the deity at a time when he was not allowed to enter the temple of Sri Nathjee owing to some serious difference with the manager thereof. Mr. Telivala attributes their origin to a different cause and writes of them as follows:

“During the period he has penned some of the finest *Vijnaptis*, Prayers. It is said that one such *Vijnapti* was written per day and the same was taken to Sri Nathjee by Ramdas. These *Vijnaptis* reveal the depths of Vitthaleshwara's heart. In them there is a harmonious blending of thought and expression. A perusal of them leaves a lasting impression on our mind. They are the outcome of a burning heart yearning passionately to meet the object of his intense love.....In these *Vijnaptis* each verse stands by itself. One publisher grouped them together into a collection of twenty-five each, but there seems to be little warrant for the same. It would not be out of place to record our own view as to the origin of the same. Vitthaleshwara was a great letter-writer. He used to send and receive letters from a good many Vaishnavas. These



were in Sanskrit prose, but in the beginning and end of each letter a verse or two were written by him to remind his pupils of their sublime mission. In course of time, the uninteresting matter of the letters came to be neglected, but the verses were collected and preserved. This being the origin of the *Vijnaptis*, we can well understand why these verses are unconnected. Unconnected as they are, they do breathe the fervent devotion of the great author. In some of them the highest and noblest sentiments find expression."

These prayers, as we read them, grow upon us as the expression of a soul reduced to the last extremity of helplessness, and having at the same time, a deep assurance that God will be found. They are born of the feeling of *Viyoga*, separation from God in the form of the Image of Sri Nathjee. Hence they strike the chords of humility and helplessness, love and surrender, pain and anguish, and deep desire and hope, which are considered integral parts of *Viyoga*. It is because of the intensity of desire caused by *Viyoga* in the heart of the devotee that the Vaishnavas of the Vallabha and the Chaitanya Sampradayas prize it as much as or even more than *Samyoga*, Union with God. According to them, both are essential to each other and therefore equally desirable. To some *Viyoga* is even more so than *Samyoga*, for in the former the whole universe is full of the Beloved, whereas in the latter only the heart is filled with Him. This idea has its root in the Bhagavata Purana, and the Gopis are the ideal types of the devotees who suffer the pangs of separation from God and enjoy their union with Him. Vitthalnatha addresses these prayers to Sri Nathjee as a handmaid of God, as a Gopi, trying to assimilate himself as much as possible to the character of the Gopis as portrayed in the Bhagavata. These prayers, therefore, breathe forth a spirit of devotion of rare quality indeed, and since the author is a poet of high order, they have a haunting beauty of their own. While disconnected in thought, being written at different times, they are a united whole in their character as longings and prayers. They represent a most remarkable outpouring of human heart and as such have an

abiding place in religious literature. They make one big psalm wherein we find the truest expression of the heart of Vallabha's Vaishnavism.

Vitthalnatha wrote several small works, such as *Sringararasa mandana*, *Vritacharya*, *Swapnadarshana*, *Prabodha*, *Guptarasa* etc. Most of these are devotional in character, while his larger works are philosophical and doctrinal. In this he shows a remarkable versatility of mind. It may be said here, by the bye, that this is true of several authors of this church. In their writings we find philosophy, theology and devotion inextricably mingled together in a beautiful manner.

An author of real importance after Vitthalnatha was his son Gokulnatha. He was more of a teacher than a writer. He wrote, however, commentaries on the *Saudasa Granthas*, the Sixteen Books of Vallabha, *Sri Purshottamjee* etc. Perhaps his most important contribution to the Sampradayic literature is in his *Vachanamritas*, talks or sayings. We have already mentioned these elsewhere. Suffice it here to say that they make a most interesting and instructive piece of religious literature. They are on all sorts of subjects, albeit relating to spiritual life, and they throw much light on the beliefs and practices of the Vallabha Church. They reveal an original insight on his part into the things of the spirit together with a characteristic way of saying things. It was probably he who first assumed the role of an Acharya and a Guru in the full sense of the term. In one of his sayings he sums up the work of the first three Acharyas including himself in this way: "The first (Vallabhacharya) proclaimed, the second (Vitthalnatha) propagated and the third (himself) protected the way." He makes a free use of parables and allegories, which is a new feature in the teaching of this Sampradaya. He is, besides, a man of rich humour, which breaks out everywhere in these sayings. All his talks were given originally in *Vraja-bhasha*, from which some of them have been translated into Gujarati.

One of the greatest names in the literary history of this Sampradaya is that of Harirai, a great grand-son of Vitthalnatha. He had taken his initiation from Gokulnatha, whom he looked upon as his Guru. His father, Kalyanrai, was, also, an author of some books. Harirai had thus a double heritage, one from his father and the other from his teacher. He was, besides, a man of profound spiritual experience, one of the very best that this Church has produced. With all his vast learning, wisdom and rich literary talent, he was remarkably simple in heart and spirit. With his deep insight he went straight to the heart of the things of the Spirit, and reduced them to their essential and ultimate elements. A spiritual genius of a high order, he realized the faith of his fathers in as full a manner as it was given to any one to do. He then brought out the rich treasures of his heart and mind, and placed them before the world in as simple and attractive a manner as he could. Owing to all this, there is an elemental simplicity about all that he wrote.

Harirai lived a long life of one hundred and twenty years from Samvata 1647 (1591 A. D.) to 1767 (1711 A. D.). During this period he is said to have written some hundreds of works, many of which are pretty small in size. Some of his books are commentaries on the various books of Vallabha, especially the Sixteen Books. In others he teaches the essence of Pusti-Marga. The names of some of these last are *Swamargiya-Sharana-Samarpana-Sevadinirupanam* (Determination of Surrender, Dedication and Service according to our way): *Pusti-Patha Nirupanam* (Determination of the Way of Grace): *Bahirmukhatva-Nirupanam* (Determination of the turning away from God): *Swarupa-nirnaya* (Determination of God's Personality): *Pusti-marga-Laxani* (The Characteristics of the Way of Grace): etc., etc. These books make excellent reading, and give one not only a clear idea of the essentials and character of the teachings of this way, but much help in the development of spiritual life. The author's sole aim in writing his books is spiritual edification of his readers. To this end he writes with an authority

derived from his own personal experience. As an author of religious significance he stands only second to Vallabha.

Perhaps the most important of his works is *Shiksha-Patra*, Letters for Edification. This is a collection of forty one letters written to his younger brother Gopeshwara on the subject of spiritual advancement in accordance with the principles of the Pusti-Marga. Written originally in Sanskrit, these letters have been translated and a number of commentaries have been written on the same in both *Vraja-bhasha* and Gujarati.

So remarkable are these letters, both in matter and style, that they form a classic of religious literature. Written in simple, chaste and beautiful language, they deal with almost all the important aspects of the new way. The sole aim of the author, however, is to lead his brother and others to the innermost sanctuary of the heart where one can have a deep realization of and fellowship with God and with God's elect souls. The letters deal with the various stages of this realization and fellowship, comparing and contrasting them with one another. They are esoteric in character and are evidently not meant for all, much less for publication in the modern manner. It might be said here incidentally that there is much in Vallabha's form of Vaishnavism which is looked upon as a kind of secret teaching, and the believers are repeatedly told not to "throw their pearls before swine" to quote the words of Jesus. This does not mean that the teachers are conscious of anything morally wrong or shady in their beliefs and practices. On the contrary their faith that what they teach is the highest truth of God never leaves them for a moment. It is their fear that their teaching is apt to be misunderstood and consequently abused by those who are not spiritually prepared to receive it, which makes them urge their followers to keep it hidden from the world. Their mind is entirely free from impurity of any kind.

This holds true even in the case of the doctrine of *Parkiya Bhakti*, which the present author comes across for the first time.



in his reading of the literature of this Sampradaya in *Shiksha-Patra*. Probably in the history of this Church Harirai was the first to give expression to it. This is the doctrine which makes the illicit but romantic love of a married woman for her lover the ideal type of love to be coveted and realized by the devotee. It may be that Harirai was perhaps influenced in this as in some other matters by the teaching of the Chaitanya Sampradaya. This doctrine had already much vogue in the Church of Chaitanya, and it had found expression in several important works. Harirai mentions Jayadeva, the author of *Gita Govinda*, as one of the great teachers of the new Bhakti Marga, and in this too he seems to have gone further than his predecessors.

Whatever this be, there is no doubt that Harirai is altogether free from any gross or sensual feeling. With him Bhakti is a mystic passion for God, which is altogether pure and free from every earthly element. He was, besides, very particular about his disciples being free from any tinge of lust. He wrote a book called *Kamakhayadosha Vivarana*, Exposition of the nature of the Sin of Lust, in which he has described the evils arising from lust. These he enumerates as follows: Theft, Violence, Untruthfulness, Hypocrisy, Lust, Anger, Pride, Insolence, Vengefulness, Faithlessness, Jealousy, Rivalry, Addiction to intoxicating drugs or drinks, etc. He urges his disciples to have no connection with persons given to the evil of lustful life.

A number of his books have been translated into both Vrajabhasha and Gujarati. Commentaries have also been written on a few of them. Recently no less than one hundred and forty seven of his books have been translated and published into Gujarati, bringing thus the rich treasures of his knowledge and devotion within the easy reach of people not knowing Sanskrit. Most of these books are very small in size, each covering hardly a page or two.

Next to Vallabha, Harirai is read the most by the members of this Church. Perhaps the greatest tribute paid to him lay in the



statement made by the well-known Gujarati scholar and author, the late Prof. Maganlal Shastri, that in order to get a proper understanding of the teachings of this Church, the best author to begin with was Harirai. Not only is he good for beginners, but so large is the variety of subjects he deals with, and so deep is his treatment of them that one might well find all the knowledge and edification he wants in regard to the Vaishnavism of Vallabha in his writings.

The mantle of this great author and teacher fell upon the shoulders of Purshottamrai. Born in Samvata 1724 (1668 A. D.), he was seventh in descent from Vallabha. He was a prodigy of learning from his boyhood, and was, besides, a genius of a high order. Not only did he study most thoroughly the teachings of his own Church, but he also learnt with much diligence the doctrines of several of the main schools of thought prevalent in his day. He carried on controversies with the leaders of many of these and earned the reputation of being a victor in them just like Vallabha. For this purpose he travelled all over India. The results of these studies and controversies of his he embodied in no less than thirty-two works.

Purshottamrai was a very prolific author and is said to have written as many as nine hundred thousand couplets in Sanskrit. This is an amazing output of literary work for any man, and it well shows his vast learning and indefatigable industry. A number of his works are in the form of commentaries on Vallabha's books. e. g. *Bhashya-Prakasha* (Gloss on Anu Bhashya): *Sri Subodhini Prakasha* (Gloss on Sri Subodhini): *Nibandhavranabhanga* (Commentary on Nibandha) etc., etc.

He is said to have employed as many as nine amanuenses, dictating to them three or four books at a time. For one who wrote so voluminously, he was an extremely careful author. He used to get three copies made of each of his works, of which one was meant for himself, another was sent to a cousin of his and the third

given to some deserving disciple. Some idea of his vast industry could be gleaned from the fact that he used to carry with him three cart-loads of books in his travels. Those were the days of travel on foot, and as he was often carried in a *Palkhi*, a kind of chair, he used to keep with him copies of important works written in small letters especially for this purpose. He thus studied and thought even while moving from one place to another.

Some of his gifts as an author and the excessive care with which he prepared his MSS. have been described by Mr. Telivala as follows:

“Sri Purshottamjee was a great master. His critical faculty was unparalleled. His love of accuracy was so great that the quotations made by him from the works of other authors, when compared with the printed texts of these works, were invariably found by us, to be at an advantage in point of accuracy. From his MSS. we find him putting a point where we use a coma: for a full stop he makes one stroke, and for a complete idea he puts two perpendicular strokes. When he wants to begin a fresh paragraph, he puts two perpendicular strokes, and leaving a space of half an inch, he puts another two strokes, and then begins a fresh paragraph. Important words are coloured with red *senna*. Sri Purshottamjee has revised his MSS. at least three or four times. Where he thought that an addition was necessary, he would affix a fine slip and re-write over it. Where the angle mark was above the line, we had to look for the addition on the top of the page on the margin, counting the number of lines mentioned at the end of the addition. Where the angle was below the line, we had similarly to look for the addition at the bottom of the page.”

The MS. referred to here is that of his *Bhashya-Prakasha*, the Gloss on the *Anu-Bhashya*. Perhaps the greatest service that Purshottamrai rendered to his Church was in the direction of making the *Anu-Bhashya* known to a wider public than it had been

before. This book was more or less shelved for over a century. Even Harirai did not pay enough attention to it. Because of this neglect, Purshottamrai had to do a kind of pioneering work, and he did it with much care and characteristic thoroughness. As the book was difficult to understand, he thought of writing a commentary thereupon. To this end he studied all the Bhashyas on the Vedanta-Sutras available with much care. He even brought together a number of scholars belonging to different schools of thought in order to learn their respective view-points. In Mr. Telivala's words "he approached the Anu Bhashya with this equipment, and his masterly review of the systems of Shankara, Ramanuja, Madhva, Bhaskara, Bhikshu and Shaiva is unparalleled in the history of Vedanta literature. Great scholars like Sudarshana, Jayatirtha, Vachaspatimisra had written commentaries on the *Bhashyas* of their respective Acharyas, but nowhere do we find the critical and comparative method such as adopted by Sri Purshottamjee in the exposition of the *Anu Bhashya*."

It was thus from the time of Purshottamrai that the attention of scholars, both within and without the Church, was drawn to the Bhashya written by Vallabha. As for the works of Purshottamrai, quite a few including his *Prakasha* are now published but several of them lie still unpublished. He did not have the spiritual depth of Harirai, but in intellect, learning and industry, he stands above all other writers of this Sampradaya.

While Purshottamrai was a boy, his uncle had made his home in Surat in Gujarata. This city was in those days at the height of its prosperity, it being the chief emporium of trade on the western coast of India. There were, then, in it a number of scholars of various schools of thought, which made it necessary for Purshottomrai to equip himself and his Church properly in order to make their position as a new mission clear and strong. It was probably this which led him to devote his attention to the *Anu-Bhashya*. In any case the intellectual atmosphere in Surat was bound to be

highly stimulating to him. He worked for forty years in this place and passed away about the year 1781 (1725 A. D.).

The work of Purshottamrai, especially in relation to the *Anu-Bhashya*, was carried forward by Gopeshwara, who too was a direct descendant of Vallabha. He was born in Samvata 1836 (1780 A. D.). His father was adopted into the family of Purshottamrai, as the latter had no child of his own. This gave Gopeshwara the possession of the Mss of Purshottamrai. The hand of Providence was in this, for there was none more qualified than he to make a proper use of them. Gopeshwara, besides being a great scholar, was a true mystic. For this he is known as a Yogi and even miraculous powers are attributed to him. Mr. Telivala writes of him as follows:

“On account of his extreme devotion to the Name and *Svarupa*, the Person of God in the form of the Image, and his aversion to anything worldly, he was fitly called by his contemporaries a *Yogi*. He was an all-round scholar. We have seen his draft of the commentary on the *Purva-Mimansa-Sutras*, the Earlier Investigation. His *Navarthi*, a commentary on the *Taittiriya-Samhita*, awaits publication. He felt himself conscious of his knowledge of the world beyond. This explains why he styles himself the Perfect Knower from the third or fourth *Pada* of first Adhyaya of *Rashmi* (his commentary on Anu Bhashya). At the end of this book, he writes about himself thus: The knower of Brahman, one who has fulfilled his duties fully, the master of his heart, one who is infallible and one who is grateful; and we think that a perusal of the *Rasmi* and the *Navarthi* would lead us to completely agree with what he himself has expressed.”

He seems to have passed away not long after the completion of this book, i. e. Samvata 1897 (1841 A. D.). The most important work of Gopeshwara is the book called *Rashmi*, Rays. It is written to simplify and supplement the exposition of the *Anu-Bhashya* given in the *Prakasha* by Purshottamrai. A disciple of Gopeshwara wrote



another commentary on *Anu-Bhashya*. Besides these there are at least three or four commentaries on the same work written by different authors. A number of books called *Vrittis* have also been written on the same work. This shows the central place of *Anu-Bhashya* in the literature of Vallabha's Church, and the remarkable devotion it has evoked in the heart of his disciples. A number of these commentaries on the *Anu-Bhashya* have been printed and are available for those who would like to read them in the original i. e. Sanskrit. There is similarly a large body of literature in the form of commentaries and glosses in Sanskrit on Sri Subodhinijee. Besides these, there are several commentaries on each of Vallabha's works. The commentaries on the different units of the collection known as the Sixteen Books in Sanskrit, Vraja-bhasha and Gujarati, are about a hundred at least.

An important author of later times was one Giridhara of Benares. He did not belong to the family of Vallabha. His most important work is *Shuddhadvaita-Martanda*, the Sun of Pure Monism. This is an able exposition of the philosophy of Vallabha. He wrote, besides, a commentary on this work.

In the foregoing we have mentioned only a few outstanding authors. Even in their case we have not given a full list of their works, since the number of these runs into hundreds. In a book called *Brihatstotrasaritsagara*, Part II, are given no less than two hundred and thirty seven works in Sanskrit, written by about eight authors of this Church. This collection is far from exhaustive even as regards the works of these authors, and the books of Purshottamrai find no place in it. Also works such as *Anu-Bhashya*, *Subodhinijee* and the bigger commentaries are not given in it. This shows the vast amount of literature in Sanskrit produced by Vallabha's Church. Most of the books given in this collection are very small in size. There are in this collection forty books of Vallabha, thirty three of Vitthala, thirteen of Raghunatha, three of another Raghunatha, seventy three of Harirai and a few by other authors.



About eighty of them give the meaning of various holidays and discuss the question of ceremonial purity. The names of the authors of these last are not mentioned.

The impulse to write in Sanskrit continued to be active until our own times. One of the latest authors in that language was Pundit Gatulaljee who passed away about a generation back. He wrote two or three important books in Sanskrit and several in Gujarati. He is in all probability the last of the authors in this Church to write in the classical language. The vernaculars have now come to their own.

## CHAPTER IV

### Literature in Vernaculars

As has been said before, vernacular literary work was begun in the Church of Vallabha in his own time. The language used for such a purpose was Vraja-bhasha, a dialect of Hindi, spoken in Vraja-land and its neighbourhood. The form that this literature then took was poetry, and that also in a limited phase of it, viz., lyrical songs or hymns. We have referred to this subject in our chapter dealing with Vallabha's *Sakhas* or Friends. The four *Sakhas* were the founders of this branch of literature, which has grown to large dimensions since their time. They were followed by four others also known as *Sakhas*. They were friends of Vitthalnatha and their names were Nandadas, Chaturbhujadas, Chhitaswami, and Govindadas. It is usual to mention these eight *Sakhas*, four of Vallabha and four of his son, together, and they are also called *Chhaps* or Seals.

In addition to these several others composed hymns and lyrics, but they never attained to the celebrity of the *Sakhas*. The few outstanding men among them are Mukunddas, Raja Askaran, Parvatdas, Prince Kiliansinhjee, Gopaldas, Alikhan and Raskhan. Of these the second and the fourth belonged to royal families of Rajputana. The last two were Moslems who had not only joined the Church of Vallabha, but had given expression to their deep love for Krishna in lyrics full of charm and beauty.

The number of hymns and lyrics composed by all these poets and many more runs into thousands. Their sole theme is Krishna in his various *Lilas* or sports. They represent thus the heart of the Vallabha Sampradaya even more than the literature in Sanskrit. While the latter deals with matters of doctrine, discipline, way of realization etc., etc., in these songs we have a most vivid and vital expression of the feeling evoked in the hearts of the poets by what is to them nothing less than the presence of their Beloved God Himself. We find therein the tenderest emotions of the heart expressed in language full of beauty, charm and tenderness.

These songs are called *Keertans*, i. e. songs of Praise and Adoration of God, Who is believed to be present in the Image. They are sung before the Deities in the Havelis on days of festivity if not every day. They are strictly confined to the *Bala-Lila* and *Kishore Lila* of Krishna, the sport which He made as a Child and a Boy in the Vraja-land. Every incident, big and small, concerning His life during this period, and His daily acts such as waking up, dressing, eating, going out to play and graze cattle with His companions, taking his meals, return home with the cows, going to bed etc., are all invested in these songs with a glory which belongs only to God. One indirect result of this is that it idealizes the every-day life of the commonest man such as a shepherd, giving it a meaning never realized before.

It is true these lyrics move within a narrow range of life and action, but they sound all the depths of feeling and sentiment which it is possible to do within such a limited sphere. Because of their profound love for their Lord, the senses of the poets such as hearing, seeing etc., have become extremely acute, making them keenly conscious of all the different moods of Nature. Accordingly, in their seasonal songs, corresponding to the different times of the year, there is a large variety of poetic feeling reflecting the manifold changes that take place in the physical world. There are, besides, a number of songs appropriate to the many and various festivals,

of this Church. To the followers of Vallabha's Vaishnavism, the whole year is a round of joyful events, and it finds its full reflection in many songs.

A major portion of these *Keertans* give expression to *Dasya-Bhakti*, the devotion to the Lord as His servants, and *Vatsalya-Bhakti*, the devotion in the form of parental love. They hold up even the *Gopis* as models of these types of Bhakti rather than of *Madhurya* or *Shringara* i. e. romantic love. *Sakhya-Bhava*, the devotion to the Lord as a friend, has also a place in these Hymns. There is in all of them a re-enacting of the drama of Krishna's life as given in the Bhagavata. It is something more than that. To the poets and composers of these songs, the Krishna of the Bhagavata is no more a distant deity who manifested Himself at some time in history, but is an ever-present Incarnation and as such the supreme object of immediate, personal and heart-felt devotion. He is the God of present experience. In all likelihood, the chief glory of Vaishnavism all over India lies in its hymns expressing the personal experience, on the part of the poets, of the immediate presence of God. These songs stand in regard to this matter unrivalled in the religious literature of the world. There is little corresponding to them in the hymnology of Christianity, the only other religion of Bhakti similar to Vaishnavism. The worship of God in the Mass in the Roman Catholic Church has many things in common with the worship of the Image by the Vaishnavas, especially of the Vallabha and the Chaitanya Sampradayas, and it has produced remarkable devotion in the heart of many Catholics. This devotion has, besides, found expression in literature which is lofty indeed, but it is neither so deep in feeling, nor so wide in extent as that of the Vaishnava Churches.

In the Church of Vallabha, the *Keertans* form the best part of its vernacular literature. A major portion of these songs are in *Vraja-bhasha* and they are sung even by those whose vernaculars

are different. The songs written in Gujarati, though not small in number, have not come up to the level of those in Vraja-bhasha.

Next to these *Keertans*, the most important part of the literature in the vernaculars should have been in the realm of biography. There is some of this kind, but it is poor both in quality and quantity. The Church of Vallabha compares very unfavourably in this matter with that of Chaitanya. It is painful to us to observe that whereas there are three classical biographies of Sri Chaitanya in Bengali, there is not one standard work on Vallabhacharya. Attempts seem to have been made pretty early in the history of the Church to meet this need, but they are far from adequate for the purpose. The dates of various events in Vallabha's life are involved in such confusion that there is little certainty about any of them.

What is in all probability the best biography of Vallabha among those available was written in the time of Vitthalnatha by one Murlidhardas. It is called *Sri Vallabhacharitra*, Life of Sri Vallabha. This was followed by another bearing the name *Yadunathvijaya*. The author of this book is believed to be Yadunatha, a grandson of Vallabha, and its date may very likely be Samvata 1658 (1602 A. D.). Later on a third book, *Sri Vallabhadigvijaya*, Universal Victory of Vallabha, was written by one Kanaialal Shastri. This author used most of the materials available in his time and wrote the book with some care, which makes it more reliable than the preceding ones. Other books were written later on such as *Vallabhavilas*, *Kalloola*, *Nijavarta*, *Charitra-Chintamani*, *Prakatyā Siddhanta* etc., but none of these is equal to *Yadunathvijaya* and *Vallabhadigvijaya*.

Of the books mentioned above perhaps the first one to be written in Vraja-bhasha was *Nijavarta* (stories concerning himself). It is written in prose and gives a number of incidents in Vallabha's life, without any effort at arranging them in chronological order.



This was followed by another small collection of stories concerning Vallabha's life after he had settled down at Adel. This is known by the name *Gharwarta*, stories regarding his home-life. The stories given in both these collections are said to have been dictated by Gokulnatha to Kaliaana Bhatta, who put them together in the form of books. Doubts, however, have been expressed as regards this origin of both these books. In course of time, in these as well as several other books bearing on the life of Vallabha, especially those in the *Vraja-bhasha*, a number of additions have been made by different writers. This makes them far from reliable and their chronology is hopelessly confused. None of the works mentioned above have the value of such classical works as Sri Chaitanya Charitramrita, Sri Chaitanya Bhagavata and Sri Chaitanya Mangala. This biographical literature again presents an equally striking contrast, in both quality and quantity, to that concerning Sri Swami Narayana, the teacher of Bhagavata Dharma, who appeared in Gujarata about a century back and who established the Church known as Sri Swami Narayana Sampradaya.

Two of the most important works belonging to the Church of Vallabha in the *Vraja Bhasha*, which have attained the rank of classics, are The Stories of Eighty-four Vaishnavas and The Stories of Two Hundred Fifty-two Vaishnavas. The first of these deals with the principal disciples of Vallabha, while the latter with those of his son Vitthalnatha. These stories are short sketches of the lives of the disciples, both men and women, with an element of supernaturalism about a number of them. They bring out mostly the spiritual experience of these Vaishnavas, experience of deep, intimate and personal communion and fellowship with God in the form of the Image. The devotees reach the climax of their devotion when God eats the food provided for Him or plays with them as their companion. In some stories we find miraculous intervention on the part of Krishna to save His faithful followers from difficult situations. This is looked upon, however, as a calamity and the devotees in whose behalf Krishna has worked miracles

look upon themselves as unfortunate for having caused trouble to their Lord. Practically all these stories are of simple men and women, belonging to all castes and classes, who devote themselves to their Lord with their heart and hand, soul and spirit, and who are rewarded by God with His personal fellowship. These men and women have set the standard of religious experience and character in the Church of Vallabha, and the books dealing with them are perhaps the most popular and widely read of all. Both these books are said to have been written by Gokulnatha, but doubts are expressed regarding this authorship. Incidentally these Stories furnish some biographical material concerning both Vallabha and Vitthalnatha.

Another book belonging to this class is the Account of Eighty-Four Seats of Vallabha. This book seems to have come into existence at about the same time as the two mentioned above, and to have been written by the same author. It gives an account of the origin of the eighty-four *Bethaks*, Seats raised in memory of Vallabha's visit to different places scattered all over India. The book mentions some of the things he did in these places. There is a touch of supernaturalism in connection with some of these visits, but on the whole the book gives a simple description of Vallabha's arrival and halt in different places, his public reading of the Bhagavata Purana, and now and then some important event that may have happened in any of these places.

A similar book is the Stories of the Four Sakhas, Friends of Vallabha. All these four books, viz., the Stories of the Vaishnavas in two books, the Stories of the Bethaks and the present one, are written in Vraja-bhasha. They are perhaps the most widely read of all by the followers of Vallabha Sampradaya. Besides these there is a voluminous literature in Vraja-bhasha, consisting mostly of commentaries on many of the books of the founder of the faith. Most of these books written in the Vraja-bhasha are read even by those who do not speak that language. This has

helped in the process of making Hindi, of which Vraja-bhasha is only a dialect, the *lingua franca* of India.

The first Gujarati author who wrote in his own tongue books concerning the teachings of this Church was Gopaldasa. We have already referred to him in connection with Vitthalnatha, whose disciple he was and who is said to have performed a miracle on him by way of removing his muteness. This event so changed his life that he devoted all his powers to the singing of the glories of the new faith. He is also said to have a vision of the *Rasa-Lila*, the eternal Dance-Sport of Krishna, which is granted to but few people. He wrote two poems *Bhakti-Piyush* and *Vallabhakhyana*. In the latter, he glorifies Vallabha and his family, paying them divine honours. He gives, besides, an able exposition of the doctrine of the new faith in these poems, which are widely read among the followers of this Sampradaya not only in Gujarata but even outside.

There was another man of the same name, a disciple of Vitthalnatha, who wrote two important poetic works called *Prakatyasiddhanta* and *Swarupa-Siddhanta*. Both these poems are valuable additions to the literature of the movement.

One of the biggest names in the history of the vernacular literature of this Sampradaya is Kavi Dayarama of Gujarata. He lived from 1767 to 1852 A. D. During this long period of nearly eighty-five years he rendered a service to both Gujarata and to the Church of Vallabha, which is unique. His work is of such significance that we have thought it proper to devote a chapter to him and his poetry. Suffice it here to say that his claim to true greatness lies in the fact, that while being a first-class poet, he devoted all his talents to the teaching and propagation of his faith. He clothed the theology, philosophy and devotion of Vallabha's Church in garbs of remarkable beauty and put them before the people of an entire province in the form of great literature. He thus gave these things a province-wide currency and a place of honour which they would never have attained otherwise. In this he probably took

as his models poets like Jayadeva of the *Gita-Govinda* fame and Narsimha Mehta. That with his remarkable poetic gifts he should have kept himself strictly within the limits of the teachings of a sect and devoted himself so whole-heartedly to the work of giving them permanent forms of great beauty and charm, is a matter of immense credit both to him and to his Church. His work in Hindi also is almost as important both in quality and quantity as that in Gujarati.

The example set by Dayarama has been followed by a number of writers in the Gujarati language, which is perhaps the only vernacular besides the Vraja-bhasha possessing a large body of Sampradayic literature. It is true there have been but few poets among these and none who can be even mentioned with the great poet. Most of the work done in this field is in prose, and the number of authors is pretty large. Of these we shall select only a few who are outstanding in the quality of their work.

One of these was the late Mr. Lalloobhai Pranvallabhadas Parekh, who wrote two or three good books bearing on the life and teachings of Vallabha. He wrote a life of Vallabha which was published in 1907 A. D., and which is so far the only one of the type of modern biographies. He drew his materials mostly from *Yadunathvijaya* and *Vallabhadigvijaya* as he says in his Preface to the book. Looking to the poverty of materials at his command and the extremely imperfect chronology of the events of Vallabha's life, his book is a worthy piece of work. In the writing of the present work, especially the portion concerning Vallabha's own life, this book has been of much help to us.

The same author wrote, besides, *Sri Krishna-Lilamrita* in two volumes. In this book he gives an exposition of the spiritual meaning of the life of Krishna. He wrote another book called *Brahmavada*, wherein he has given a kind of summary of the various important controversies that Vallabha had in his life-time.



There were rough outlines of these in the various biographies of Vallabha mentioned above, and it was from these as well as the doctrinal works of Vallabha himself that the author reconstructs the philosophical system of the new faith, and presents it in an interesting manner. He gives this exposition in the form of a dialogue, making it thus almost artistic.

Lalloobhai Parekh, besides, translated the first chapter of *Tattvarthadipa Nibandha* of Vallabha, giving along with it short summaries of the two most important commentaries thereupon, one by Vallabha himself and the other by Purshottamrai. He wrote, in addition to these, two or three small works. Altogether his literary work is decidedly of a superior quality and one wishes there were more of such writers in this Church. A highly educated man, he served as a Judge of the Small Cause Court of Ahmedabad for years. He had a fine critical sense with which he weighed everything well, was well-read in the literature of religious movements other than his own, and was above all deeply devoted to God and to his Church. He had a fine style which reflected the high qualities of both his head and heart. His books are indeed a valuable contribution not only to the literature of his own Church but to that of the province.

An author of about the same generation as that of Lalloobhai is Mr. Ranchhoddas V. Patwari who is still youthful in spirit though advanced in age, he being nearly eighty years old. He has been a leader of the entire Vaishnava community for years, and is well known for his probity and self-sacrificing labours on behalf of his Church. He is a member of the Committee of Management of the chief shrine of this Church at Nathdwara. He was the Vice-President of the all-India Conference of this body all the time that it was active, a period of nearly twenty years. He is an able lawyer and has served in his younger days more than one important State in the capacity of a Diwan. He has written a book called *Pusti-Margiya-Siddhanta*, the Doctrines of Pusti Marga, in three small



volumes. In this he has given an outline of the principal tenets of his Church with special reference to the Maharaja Libel Case in the last volume. He has also helped in the publication of some works pertaining to the faith. The late Prof. Maganlal Shastri was another person who did much important work in this field. He was a Professor of Sanskrit for several years in Government Colleges in the Province of Bombay. He edited a number of Sanskrit books belonging to the faith and translated some into Gujarati. His most important work is his Introduction to a translation made by himself of *Shuddhadvaita Martanda*. It is a masterpiece and can well rank as an independent work by itself. He passed away some time back leaving several Mss which await publication.

One of the greatest research scholars that this Sampradaya has produced was the late Mr. Mulchand Telivala who died at the age of thirty-nine in 1926 A. D. Within the period of such a short life, he rendered a piece of service to his Church, which is unique. With immense labour and patience he collected a number of Mss of *Anu Bhashya*, *Sri Subodhini* and some of the minor works of Vallabha together with those of several important commentaries thereupon, and edited and published them all in a number of volumes. This was a herculean task and he performed it with a devotion worthy of it in every way. Handicapped by poverty which was self-imposed, with poor health, a large family and the difficulty which attended the work of hunting for Mss., he put himself, nevertheless, body and soul, at the service of his Sampradaya, and toiled with incessant labour and unrelenting zeal in the cause of placing its great literature before the world. A number of his friends and co-workers published a short sketch of his life in English as a tribute to his memory, from which we shall quote the following:

“He had a very wonderful genius for research. His critical faculty, powerful imagination, extremely retentive memory and a deep all-round knowledge of the Sampradayaic Gathas helped this

aptitude for research to such an extent that he compelled old outworn manuscripts to speak out, to whom they belonged, from whom they were stolen, when they were written, in whose hand-writing they were and other special details about each of them, with a quickness and preciseness which would put to shame even the hero of a detective novel."

Mr. Telivala was something of a thinker. He was unfortunately too busy with research-work to find time to write original works. His early death, besides, did not allow his talents and powers in this line to come to fruition. What little he has left, however, in the shape of introductory sketches of the life of Vallabha and Vitthalnatha, and a Prize Essay for the University of Bombay, shows that he was an able expositor of his faith. Had he lived longer he would have certainly rendered his Church a great service in the direction of original work. The sketches of biographies and the Prize Essay mentioned above are in English, and they are probably the first things written in that language concerning Vallabha's life and teachings by an Indian author.

This scholar and author could do all this remarkable work because he was something of a mystic. His heart was set on God and he had dedicated himself entirely to His service. As his biographers say, "the guiding principle of his life lay in the words *Everything else except God is painful*, given in the *Antaryamin Brahmana* of the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*." He had, besides, deep faith in the teachings of his Church, which it was the mission of his life to put before the world. It was a pity for him and his Church that he could not be set apart with suitable provision for him and his family while many of the Maharajas rolled in wealth and luxury.

Another writer of importance is Mr. Dhirajlal V. Sankalia, who is still living and active in the work of putting before the people of Gujarata some of the literature of this sect. He was a

co-worker with Mr. Telivala and helped him much in the editing and publishing of *Anu Bhashya* etc.

Mr. Telivala has a worthy successor in Mr. Jethalal Shah, a Professor of the Mahila Vidyalaya at Ahmedabad. Being a student of philosophy, he devoted himself to the serious task of translating *Anu Bhashya* with some of the important commentaries thereupon into Gujarati. This book has already appeared in two bulky volumes with suitable introductions to both of them. He has also written a small book in English called a *Primer of Anu Bhashya*. He is one of the best living scholars belonging to this Church, and his many introductions to different books pertaining to Vallabha Sampradaya are a store-house of accurate knowledge. What he has done so far is only an earnest of much greater things to come from his pen in future. He is another writer who could be set apart for literary work to the great advantage of the Church.

Nanulal Gandhi, Vasantaram Shastri and Prof. Govindlal Bhatt are some of the able authors of Vallabha's Church among the living to-day.

The efforts of these and many others have resulted in a large body of literature in the shape of translations of all the works of Vallabha with several commentaries thereupon, as well as of a number of books of Vitthalnatha, Harirai and others in Gujarati. The number of such translations runs perhaps into hundreds and it is still growing. There is, however, a dearth of original writers, and except the poetical works of Dayarama, there is very little that could be compared with the best works of this Church in Sanskrit or Vraja bhasha. All the same whatever literature is there has brought home to the people of Gujarata the saving truths of Pusti-Marga and has enriched the life of the entire province. Its service in this direction is similar to that of the literature of the Chaitanya Sampradaya in Bengal.

We have drawn in this chapter and the one immediately preceding but a bare sketch of the literary activities of the Vallabha Sampradaya extended over a period of more than four centuries. It is but a rough outline of a body which is large and well-rounded, and which, both in quality and quantity, is so great as to constitute one of the glories of Hindu religious literature.

## CHAPTER V

### **Some Characteristic Features**

The religious movement inaugurated by Vallabha has been known as one of Vaishnavism from early times. As such it has much in common with those associated with the names of Ramanuja, Madhva etc. It differs, nevertheless, from these in some important respects, which was the cause and justification of its origin. It has some special features which it is our present purpose to describe here.

The most important characteristic of Vallabha's movement is its emphasis on Bhakti, which is almost absolute. Many of the Vaishnava movements preceding it had left room for both Karma and Jnana, Ritualistic Action and Knowledge, in their scheme of salvation, making Bhakti only one ingredient, though the most important, among others essential for final beatitude. In this matter both Vallabha and Chaitanya were in full agreement with one another. Vallabha, however, went a step further when he called his way Pusti-Marga, the path of grace, rather than Bhakti-Marga, the path of devotion. There lies behind this nomenclature a vital difference in the way of looking at things on the part of both these great men. In the path of Bhakti the initiative for salvation lies with the individual soul, whereas in that of Pusti it remains with God. According to Vallabha it is the grace of God rather than the



devotion of the soul which is the beginning and the end of true religious life in every human being. When the human will of the individual plays a part in one's religious life in seeking and following means etc., the soul falls short of the true ideal of divine life. In Vallabha's scheme of salvation Bhakti does play a large part, but it is Bhakti of the wholly spontaneous and disinterested kind, and it is both the means and the end at the same time. It is more than this. It is the reflex action of the soul to Pusti, the grace of God, and as such it is entirely subordinate to the latter. According to this point of view God has the primacy of place in everything pertaining to one's religious life. Herein lies the beauty and glory of Vallabha's teaching. In this it is almost unique not only in the history of Hinduism but in that of religions in general. In Christianity, the only other religion similar to Vaishnavism in many things, the three men, St. Paul, Augustine and Luther, who had most to do with the moulding of the religious thought and life of Christendom, emphasized the grace of God as exclusively as Vallabha. But somehow or other, they all had to work in an environment which did much towards weakening this emphasis, and the Christian Church was, thus, robbed of the fruits of a pure way of Grace. The anti-thesis between Law and Grace or Faith and Works given expression to by St. Paul was soon subordinated to the needs and claims of the unity of a Church which had to face an indifferent and even a hostile world, and a kind of synthesis was made of the beliefs of the various groups within the Church. The same thing happened to the doctrine of Pure Grace as taught by St. Augustine, for then the Catholic Church with its spiritual and temporal powers and claims had come into being, and it made room for both Law and Grace, Faith and Works, in its capacious bosom. Luther revolted against this synthesis which he looked upon as spurious and even worse, but he could not go far in the work of building a new Church on the doctrine of Grace alone because of the largely secular outlook that he and his so-called followers were obsessed with from the start of their separation from the parent Church.

The religious movement of Vallabha is perhaps the only one in the whole of history to be based altogether on the Grace of God. As such it ushers the soul into the immediate presence of God, a fact which is well signified by the term *Brahma-Sambandha*, relationship with God, which its initiation means. Vallabha is so anxious to keep this relationship as pure as possible that he would not allow anything, not even supernatural miracles, to intervene between God and the souls elected by Him for His devotion and service. This feature of his teaching is one of the most striking things we have come across in our study of this movement. It is moreover widely confirmed in his own life and practice as well as those of a number of his followers. There are a number of stories illustrating this, of which we shall give here the following:

"Ramdasjee used to serve the Lord with much love and devotion. In this service of his, he was most particular about the things offered to the Image, so much so that he used to fetch the water himself from the well required for the purpose of cooking food etc., for the Image. He used to do this in spite of the fact that he was a rich man. He spent away so much of his money in his service of God that he was faced with poverty. He then invested what little money was left in some business with the result that the tide of his fortune began to turn for the better. Now it so happened that this business, which was that of selling a particular kind of cloth, was not to the liking of the Lord. Hence one day, the Lord said to him: "Now you are serving me from the proceeds of the sale of this dirty cloth." At this Ramdasjee was much grieved and going to the merchant with whom he was in partnership asked him to return his share of the money as he did not want to carry on the business any more. Much surprised at this, the man said: "Why are you doing this when the business is so thriving?" To this Ramdasjee replied: "What can I do? I have to deal with a boy (meaning Krishna), and I must satisfy his whims." The man then returned the money which belonged to him. Ramdasjee now began to spend money from his capital with the result

that it was soon finished. He then began to buy the things necessary for the service of the Lord on credit, with the result that he was heavily in debt soon. The creditor then threatened him with legal proceedings. This caused Ramdasjee so much pain that the Lord Himself went to the creditor as Ramdasjee and paid him all his dues. Some time after this Ramdasjee happened to pass by the shop of this merchant, when the latter calling him said: "Well, Sir, why do'nt you buy things from me now that our account is cleared?" Being much surprised at this and not knowing what the merchant meant, he asked him to show him the account. When this was done, his surprise knew no bounds, for he found that the entire sum was not only paid but there was his own signature. He now understood whose work this was, and returning home told his wife that he would now take some service. So anxious was he to secure a job as soon as possible that he did not hesitate to accept that of a policeman, although it was far below his station in life. It was now difficult for him to be as particular as he was before in regard to the service of the Lord. He came once to Vallabhacharya in this new state of his, when the latter told him: "Ramdasjee, you are blessed indeed!" At this, the Vaishnavas, who were present, were much surprised, for they had noticed the change in Ramdasjee, and not knowing its cause had attributed it to a lack of faith and zeal on his part. The Acharya then told them that he was blessed indeed, for he would not cause the Lord any trouble on his account."

There are a number of stories of this kind in the history of this Church which, whatever be their truth, show how Vallabha and his followers looked upon what would have been considered glorious by the followers of most religions, as something to be shunned. Such an attitude towards miracles wrought by God to save His devotees from difficulties and troubles, is one of the most striking things we have come across in our study of this movement.

In strict accordance with this attitude is another remarkable feature of this movement viz., that it eschews prayer altogether.

Prayer of any kind; even for spiritual life, is considered wrong, since in order to fulfil it God is required to take some pains. The idea behind this is that one's faith in and devotion to God should be absolutely disinterested, and that it should mean nothing less than doing our best to serve the good pleasure of God. Faith in God, according to this movement, requires us to do God's bidding and not God to do ours that much of prayer usually means. Besides, God Himself is to be the sole object of one's devotion and nothing else. To Vallabha and his disciples, even those men and women, known in the history of Hindu religion as true and ideal devotees, do not show Bhakti at its best, because God had to work miracles for them in order to save them from difficult situations. This is well brought out in the following saying of one Matulaljee, a lineal descendant of Vallabha, who lived in recent times:

“If a soul worshipped God but had its mind set on things of the world, the latter might be pleased with him, but not God. If one wants to please God, he should give up all worldly desires and serve Him alone. One must have full trust in God alone in order to please Him. Because of this the way of Bhakti is very difficult to follow. What is Bhakti? People say that God saved Gajendra from death, but this is not Bhakti. God supplied Draupdi with about a thousand *saris* (upper cloth) to save her from disgrace on their removal one after another by Duryodhana and his companions in order to humiliate the Pandavas, but this is not Bhakti. God became the charioteer of Arjuna on the battlefield, but this is not Bhakti. Yasoda bound Krishna when he used to run away from home or eat clay, and he showed her the fourteen universes in his mouth, but this is not Bhakti. Again when Indra was wrathful and wanted to destroy all the people in the Vraja-land by a deluge of rain, the Gopas and the Gopis prayed Krishna to save them, and he protected them by holding Mt. Giriraja on one of his fingers: this too was not Bhakti. When Krishna, in his Rasa-Lila, disappeared from view, and the Gopis, full of the pangs of separation, went about seeking him from place to place,



that too was not Bhakti. So long as Bhakti is not altogether free from any worldly desires, it is not of the proper kind."

On being asked what true Bhakti was, he said:

"Real and disinterested Bhakti is born only when the soul is free from the I ness and Mine-ness: never otherwise. There should be absolutely no desire left in one's mind. One should have only one desire, viz., to rest on the lotus-feet of God. No desire for oneself, and constant service and praise of God, no desire to have one's salvation even, and the sole thought of pleasing God, the sure conviction that one is in this world only to serve God and to have no other thought but this, "all this pleases God:" and that is Bhakti."

Another important feature of the movement is to keep the religious life of the devotee hidden as far as possible from others. As has been said elsewhere in this book, a kind of godly hypocrisy, if such a term be allowed, is encouraged and even enjoined. The life of devotion is a secret between a soul and God which should not be divulged to others, especially those who are not prepared for it. This secret is to be kept not only from non-believers but even from such fellow-believers as may not have reached the proper stage to understand and appreciate the deeper things of God. There are several stories illustrating this feature, of which we give the following:

"Gokuldas was a wealthy man. Once upon a time he came to Gokula with a cheque for one hundred thousand Rs. He came along with several Vaishnavas, all of whom offered their gifts to Gosainjee (Vallabha's son Vitthalnatha) on their being presented to him. Gokuldas, however, did not offer anything, whereupon the others began to find fault with him saying that he was a miser. He heard these remarks with much equanimity. Meantime he had placed his cheque unobserved under the cushion of the seat of Gosainjee.



This was seen by a personal attendant of the latter, and when the party had left he spoke of it to his master. After this the Vaishnavas remained in Gokula for several days, but none of them knew of the gift made by Gokuldas. On the other hand he allowed himself to be found fault with as one lacking in faith."

In this we have a fine illustration of the practice of the precept "Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth." It goes even a step further since the man allows himself to be considered mean when he could have received much praise from his fellow-believers. There are a number of such stories in the literature of this movement.

Another important characteristic of this Church is that it discourages as much as possible the making of one's living by one's religious life. This is well illustrated by the following story:

"A Bengali, who lived in Vrandavana, maintained himself by the labour of his hands. Once Sri Gosainjee came to Vrandavana when this man became his disciple. The Vaishnavas of the place, now looking upon him as one of themselves, began to give him a higher wage than what he received formerly. The man thought this to be wrong inasmuch as it amounted to a sale of his religion. It is written in the Scriptures that the man who begs his bread in the name of God goes to hell, for which reason one should never make an exhibition of his religion in the course of his work or labour. Thinking thus, he used to wash off the mark of his faith on his forehead and hide his necklace of Tulsi beads, before he went to work. He kept thus his faith secret. Once upon a time he forgot to wash the *Tilaka* (the sign on the forehead) and was leaving his home for work, when the Lord said to him: "Go after washing off your *Tilak*." This made the man extremely happy. From that day the Lord used to speak with him daily, giving him much joy. This Bengali had received such favour with the Goswami."

We must say here that an exception has been made in regard to this matter in the case of the Acharyas, i. e. the successors of Vallabha. We do not know exactly how Vallabha's own financial affairs were managed. The accounts of his life give us the impression that he had inherited a substantial amount of property from his father. He is also said to have received rich presents, a large part of which he gave away as soon as possible. He had a small family, and lived, besides, a simple contented life. The Church grew under Vitthalnatha with financial responsibilities growing along with it. It is said that he incurred heavy debts for the purpose of establishing and consolidating the Sampradaya, and that indebtedness has remained a feature of the life of many of the Acharyas ever since. This indebtedness may be due to the princely style of living of most of them. It is, besides, attributed to a curse given to Vitthalnatha by one of his uncles because he did not comply with his request for a boy from his family for the purpose of adoption. The tradition is that Vitthalnatha asked one or two of his grand-sons if they would like to be adopted by the uncle, but none showed any willingness to go. This uncle is not heard of except in regard to this matter and in all probability he never joined the Church of Vallabha. If there be any truth in this story of the request for a boy and the curse in consequence of its non-fulfillment, the uncle must have been a man of means. This goes to confirm our impression of Vallabha inheriting substantial property from his father.

Whatever this be, there is no doubt that Vitthalnatha was not free from financial embarrassment and even debts. He followed, however, certain principles in the matter of acceptance of gifts from his disciples, which are not without an interest of their own. They are well illustrated in the following story:

"Champabhai of Gujarata worked as a sort of secretary to Sri Goswamin. He had so much faith in the Master that he saw no defect in him. Once upon a time Goswamin left with him for

Gujarata, when on the way Raja Birbal met the party. As it was winter time, Birbal asked Champabhai why Sri Goswamin had chosen such a season to travel about. The latter replied that it was due to his being heavily indebted. Hearing this Birbal said that he would gladly pay all his debts if that would prevent him from going to distant parts in the cold weather. Champabhai said this to Gosainjee, whereupon the latter said to himself: "Champabhai's mind has become worldly: this is why he thinks I go because I am in need of money, whereas the real purpose of my visit is to save souls." He then left the place at midnight without letting Birbal know anything about it. The next day he told Champabhai that he should undergo some penance, since he had committed a sin by attributing such a motive to him. He added that the Lord did not accept money from Princes, Prostitutes, Misers, Thieves and from all those who may have earned it by breach of trust or fraud or violence, and that, therefore he should never speak to any one about it. If the Lord wanted to accept money from any one, it would come of its own accord. A man's mind becomes evil if he eats the food of evil men even though he himself may be a holy man. It is not that the food itself is evil, but because it has been bought by tainted money it becomes harmful. Owing to this one should save himself from evil food and evil company."

In the following we have another story showing a beautiful trait in the character of Vitthalnatha and the movement at its highest. We see therein how God and Mammon are placed in sharp contrast to each other and how God wins the victory over Mammon. It stands thus:

"Khushaldas, having earned much money took it all to Gosainjee. When he came, the latter was engaged in preparing himself for the worship of the Lord. On hearing from Khushaldas what he had come for, he remained silent for some time. Then he went into his private room for his worship. When he came out after finishing his worship, Khushaldas bowed down to him and

offered the money which amounted to about three lacs of Rs. Gosainjee, however, told him that he could not accept the gift and asked him to take it back. At this the latter was much perturbed and requested the Goswamin to tell him what sin he had committed for him to be punished in this way. Gosainjee replied that it was through no fault of his that his gift was refused, but that it was the very nature of the thing offered which was the cause of the refusal. He added that when Khushaldas first told him about the offering he had brought, he was preparing for the divine service and that it caused distraction to his mind. He further said that if the mere idea of it was dangerous, much more so would the possession of such a big sum be, and that it was being refused on that account. Khushaldas then felt that he himself would suffer in the same way if he kept the money, and accordingly gave it away to others. He did not keep anything for himself. Such was his faith in Gosainjee."

One wishes that the Church of Vallabha had continued to follow in the foot-steps of Vitthalnatha in regard to money as seen in these incidents. Unfortunately it has been far from particular as to where it derives its wealth from, with the inevitable result that it has deteriorated much in many ways.

A thing that has struck us much in our study of this movement is the fact that there is rarely any mention of a new birth following upon the acceptance of its faith and principles. This is all the more strange because we have here all the elements of belief in the re-birth of the soul. Its *Brahma-Sambandha* is nothing less than a new birth of the soul in God. We have come across only one story among hundreds concerning different aspects of religious life, wherein mention is made of a new birth. It is full of exaggeration and has in it much that is incongruous with true regeneration. The story is not only extremely crude but is unbelievable, and is an account of the tempting of Providence. But it shows that the idea of a second birth is not entirely absent.



One of the noblest features of all the movements of Bhakti-Marga, in India or outside, is the cultivation of love for one's fellow-believers, irrespective of caste or race. Love of this kind may be open to the charge that it is not universal and that it often degenerates into a kind of defensive and even offensive alliance against non-believers. The latter has often been the case with Semitic faiths such as Christianity and Islam. Happily this perversion of sectarian love has not been much in evidence in Hinduism, thanks largely to the deep grounding of the majority of the Hindus in the principle and practice of *Ahimsa* (non-violence), and to the profoundly religious nature of the people. There has been persecution no doubt of non-believers among the Hindus, but it has been on the whole rare as compared with other people. As for the first charge, viz., that love for one's fellow-believers is limited and not universal, it is true in most cases. We must remember in this connection that it is only among the best of people, the saints of God, that true and deep love for all human beings can be found. Such people are always rare in any Church. Meantime, we must be thankful that there are numbers of people, who, at any rate, enlarge their hearts to such an extent as to make room for people who are not bound to them by ties of blood. Love of this kind is a positive gain to the world and as such extremely desirable. The followers of most Vaishnava Sampradayas are noted for such love among themselves. There are several stories in the literature of this movement illustrating this trait, of which we shall make room for the following:

"Once upon a time when Gosainjee went to Gujarata, he initiated a man into the faith. This man was then given an Image which he worshipped in accordance with the practice of the Church. So hospitable was he that many Vaishnavas frequented his house as guests. Once he had a visit from several of them in the cold season. He gave to them all the covering and bedding he had in the house reserving nothing for himself, with the result that he could not sleep. He then began to pass his time in remembering



the Lord. At this the Lord came out from the room in which the Image was and told him that He himself was unable to sleep and that He was quaking with cold. The man replied to the Lord that He would not have been able to sleep if the Vaishnavas who had been his guests had lacked bedding and covering, and that he himself would love to suffer any punishment for the sin of keeping the Lord from sleep. Hearing this the Lord laughed and said: "Your devotion is so great that your name is enough to expiate the guilt of others. How is it possible then for you to have any guilt for doing such an act as this? I am pleased with you and shall grant you any boon you may ask for." To this he replied: "My prayer is that my love for my fellow-believers may increase day by day, because it is owing to this love that You have condescended to speak to me to-day." The Lord said Amen to this. From that day the Lord used to speak to him daily."

As has been said already, one of the most notable features of Vallabha's movement is an almost total disregard for ritualistic works. In this it is unique among the Vaishnava movements with the solitary exception of that of Sri Chaitanya. It draws the sharpest of contrasts between Devotion and Ritualistic Works, or what the Christians have called after St. Paul Faith and Works. It has not, however, broken with the *Varnashrama Dharma* which it looks upon more as a social than a religious system. Because of this it does conform to the rules and conventions of society or rather the Caste-system, giving rise, thus, to tension in various degrees in the life of the disciples. There are two definite schools of opinion in the Church, one holding that no rituals whatsoever should be practised and the other allowing some conformity to them. Happily these have continued to remain together in the Church and no sub-sect has arisen on this matter. It seems these schools of opinion are a later growth, but the tension spoken of above has been felt in the movement from its early days. In the following story we have an example of the way in which it was felt and resolved in the life of a disciple. It stands thus:

A Brahmin, well-versed in Scriptural lore, was much given to performing ritualistic works enjoined by the Scriptures. Once he came to Gokula and became a disciple of Gosainjee. He heard from the latter the characteristics of souls born of God, one of them being the performance of ritualistic duties and works with a view to hide from people one's inner devotion. Apart from this such works were in no sense obligatory on true devotees. Hearing this he resolved to give up his love for works. He returned home bringing with him an Image which he worshipped with true devotion. He maintained himself by begging and devoted most of his time to the worship of God. Once being late in arranging his place for his worship, he began to sweep the house with haste. While doing this the string with which the broom was bound snapped, and as he did not want to be late for his worship, he just took off his sacred thread and bound the broom with it. At this God laughed and said to him: "Now I am truly pleased with thee. Thou knowest that a Brahmin goes to hell if he does not perform the works enjoined in the Vedas, and yet thou art prepared to go there for My sake. I am indeed much pleased with thee. Thou mayest ask for any boon thou likest, and I shall grant it." To this the Brahmin folding his hands replied: "My Lord, I do not want anything. I only want that you should speak and talk with me always." God then asked him to put on his sacred thread again, whereupon the Brahmin replied: "What have I to do with such things now?" Upon this God said that it was necessary for him to do so in order that the people of the world may not be unnecessarily offended. The Brahmin then put on the thread and continued his worship. The Lord used to talk to him every day and gave him His fellowship."

A noteworthy characteristic of Vallabha's Church is that there is no place in it for Sadhus or Sannyasis. In this it differs not only from all other Vaishnava movements including that of Chaitanya but from most Hindu religious bodies. It simply does not believe in Sadhus or Swamis. According to Vallabha, in this

Dark Age only one kind of Sannyasa is proper, viz., that of Bhakti. He himself took it at the end of his life and it was only a prelude to his passing away. It is doubtful if he has been followed by many in this matter in his Church. Possibly none of his followers ever felt the pangs of separation from God as he did, which alone, according to him, justified the taking of Sannyasa. In course of time, however, some of those who had never married owing to one reason or another, or who had been bereaved of their families etc., and had in consequence devoted themselves entirely to the service of God, came to be known as *Viraktas*. These men were never organised as a class or a group, and were known as such in their individual capacity. The question would naturally occur in the mind of some, especially in view of the hoary tradition of Hindu religious life, whether these people are considered in any way superior to the ordinary householder. The surprising thing is that this subject has rarely been discussed in this Church, which shows that men of this type were not common or that they did not have a position high enough to attract much attention.

This has ruled out what is called "the heroic element" of religious life by the late celebrated Baron von Hugel, the great Christian mystic and divine, from the Church of Vallabha altogether. According to Vallabha any heroism of this kind would be taking away an equal measure of God's grace, the very thought of which was unbearable to him. This leaves the other element called by Hugel "homeliness" to have full play in the religious life of this Church, and perhaps in no other movement it has been sanctified to the same extent as in this. Vallabha's is essentially a movement of homeliness transfused through and through with the grace and glory of God.

One of the glories of all the Vaishnava Churches in India is their universality. The Gospel proclaimed by them is meant for all, irrespective of race or sex or creed. In their eyes all human beings are eligible for salvation. Vaishnavism or the Bhagavata

Dharma in India, from the the time of the Bhagawad Gita, started with a bias towards the under-privileged and the suppressed, and it has been true to the same all along its course. The various movements that it gave rise to may not have been able to put this principle of universal brotherhood into practice fully, but there is no doubt that it is they which have been largely instrumental in removing or at least lowering the barriers existing between different castes and communities among the Hindus. They have not been all alike in this, which is due to various causes such as the relative strength of the Bhakti element, the particular kind of social and political environment in which each worked, etc., etc. This is just what has happened to Christianity which, even to-day, in spite of all its boast of universality, can not even think of having the same churches and cemeteries for both the white people and the negroes in America and Africa. The Bhakti movements in India did not hesitate to admit the Non-Aryans and even the Moslems into their fold. This latter thing is true especially of the Chaitanya, Vallabha and Swami Narayana Sampradayas. As for the movement of Vallabha, it began to do this from the time of the founder himself. He is said to have had one or two Moslem disciples. His son Vitthalnatha continued the practice of admitting Moslems into the Church, one of whom deserves special mention.

The name of this Moslem disciple was Ras Khan. He has been thought by some to be a Pathan and by others a Syed. It is certain that he came from a noble family intimately associated with the Mogul Court. He is said to have been born in the latter half of the sixteenth century, being thus 'a contemporary of Vitthalnatha. He was, besides, a poet of real merit. It has been said of him that he was a lover of Beauty from his childhood, and without a doubt he loved Nature as only true poets do. This love of his increased with years. He had also a gift for friendship. In his early youth he formed a friendship with a Hindu of his age which engrossed all his mind and became an obsession. In course of time, hearing from a Vaishnava about Sri Krishna, Ras Khan came



to be smitten by a love for Krishna which was deep and profound. He was filled with a passionate desire to have the *Darshana* of Krishna, in His temple on Mt. Giri, a thing which he was not allowed to do on account of his being a Moslem. He gave up food and drink, and began to seek God here and there in order that he might find Him. For three days he went about like a mad man, crying out aloud for God. This was unbearable to God, and accordingly on the fourth day when Vitthalnatha went to Him in the morning, He said to him:

“A spiritual soul of non-Aryan origin has been sitting on the bank of *Govindkund* for three days without food. When I appeared to him, he ran to touch me, but I came away from him since you have not accepted him as your disciple. I shall accept him when you give him my name.”

This was in other words a command to Vitthalnatha to make Ras Khan a disciple, which was done soon by giving him initiation into the Church. After this he was allowed to enter the temples belonging to the faith.

Ras Khan, who was a true devotee and a Bhakta, consecrated himself entirely to the service of Krishna. Being a poet he devoted all his gifts to the singing of the praise and glory of God. He composed a number of beautiful songs describing his deep experiences of God's love, grace and beauty. Many of these songs are brought together in the form of two small books called *Ras Khan Sujana* and *Prema Vatika*.

It was in this way that the doors of Vallabha's Church were opened to the Moslems. The number of such disciples has been on the whole extremely small, which may be due to the fact of the decline in the missionary zeal of the Church. It may also be due to the extreme difficulty of a Moslem joining a Hindu Church in those days of Moslem domination in the land. It is worthy of note that Vitthalnatha had some disciples even among the Untouchables. This is evident from the following story:



"Once upon a time Gosainjee and his party, while returning from Gujarata to Vraja-land, lost their way. They then found a Balai (a man belonging to an untouchable community) and asked him to show them the way, which the man willingly consented to do, especially as he had to go in the same direction. At noon the party rested for their meal etc., when they gave the Balai some food to eat. As soon as the man ate this food, his mind became pure and he saw God in Gosainjee. He then requested the latter to make him his disciple. Gosainjee, taking pity on him, gave him the Name. The party soon after came to the village where the Balai lived. The man then brought his wife to Gosainjee and got her initiated into the faith by him. She partook of the holy food which made her mind pure. The influence of this was even greater in her case than in his, for while returning home she was so overwhelmed by the feeling of separation from God that she fainted. The man brought her back in this condition to Gosainjee who soon brought her to her senses. Then both the husband and the wife went with the party to Gokula. They walked at a little distance from others so that they may not touch them. On reaching the river Yamuna, the party crossed over to the other side in a ferry, but the two Balais remained on this side as no boat would take them over. They then felt their separation from Vitthalnatha so much that they both had fever and they fainted. Gosainjee on coming to know of this sent some people to fetch them. This was done accordingly, the Balais remaining unconscious all the time. Then Gosainjee touched them with his feet and they both came to their senses. They prayed him to do something in their behalf so that they might have his *darshan* every day. Gosainjee then gave them his wooden sandals and asked them to worship them. He also told them that they would have his darshan in the sandals whenever they desired it. They were asked, besides, to offer to the sandals milk and fruit, and to go and live in a quiet place. They did this and Gosainjee manifested himself to them every day twice, in the morning and in the evening. Their faith and devotion grew so

much that they are said to have performed a miracle, which led to the conversion and initiation into the new faith of a number of Brahmins and a Prince."

According to the accounts given in the book *The Stories of Two Hundred and Fifty-two Vaishnavas*, in Vitthalnatha's own time, several Bhils are said to have been converted to the new faith owing to the efforts of Chacha Harivamsa. It would seem, therefore, that in those early days this branch of Vaishnavism, along with others, did not hesitate to carry its redemptive message even to the Aborigines, the Moslems and the Untouchables. But this phase of it did not last long. As the Church grew in wealth, prestige and respectability, it fell in a line with the strictly orthodox Varnashramite Hinduism, and no more converts came from the classes mentioned above. This is just what has happened to most of the forward movements within the pale of Hinduism. The same phenomenon is visible elsewhere too. Dynamic movements in course of time are inevitably swallowed up by the large amount of inertia residing always in humanity, and they in their turn give place to others having a more vital programme. This makes it necessary for a movement, if it wants to live and grow, to be constantly undergoing the process of reform and reconstruction within itself. In accordance with this law, this Church must re-orientate itself to the new needs and problems that have arisen in the country, such as for example the fusion of castes or sub-castes at any rate, the abolition of untouchability etc., etc., and must help in the great work of the reconstruction of the Hindu Society going on in the land to-day. In matters like these, its present attitude is anything but satisfactory: it is apt to be even obstructive and reactionary. It can be this, however, at its own peril. The new forces that have been let loose in the land or for that matter all over the world are too big to be held in leash by any sect or religion. It is just because the Bhagavata Dharma, the religion of Devotion and Duty to God, has a larger understanding of God's ways and work, it has a great part to play in the reconstruction of

Humanity. It alone can appraise properly the worth of the great forces working in Humanity, and with its large and universal sympathy it can give the true lead to mankind. In this matter, the life of Sri Krishna, the originator and the exemplar of the Bhagavata Dharma in Aryavarta, presents to us the noblest example of all. Standing in the very midst of the greatest struggle and crisis in the history of Ancient India, he wisely turned inch by inch the forces of evil to their inevitable destruction and secured the triumph of the forces of righteousness. He did not hide his face ostrich-like in the sands and allow the tempest to blow over, nor did he advise Arjuna, his best-beloved friend and disciple, to do the same. Rather he faced fully all the forces of evil and challenged them to do their worst, for he knew that that was the only way to conquer them, and he taught Arjuna to do the same. The Vaishnava movements, which are the most important part of the Bhagavata Dharma in India, must do the same to-day if they are to be true to their genius and spirit. Not only should they deepen their devotion to God, but they should also broaden themselves out in humanitarian work and social service, looking upon all human beings as potential children of God.

Most of the stories given above are taken from *The Stories of Two Hundred Fifty-two Vaishnavas*. The first is taken from *The Stories of Eighty-four Vaishnavas*. As has been said elsewhere, both these books came to be written later on, which fact must be taken into account in appraising the historical truth behind them. Stories of this kind grow like snow-balls almost unconsciously, and they are written with a view to preach a particular gospel. There is bound to be in them, besides, an element of exaggeration in the form of supernaturalism or over-emphasis on certain aspects of teaching and practice. They are extremely valuable, nevertheless, to the student of religious movements, as showing the drift and tendency of the faiths and Churches they represent.

We might well bring this chapter to a close by quoting the following saying which sums up the characteristics of a true devotee of God. It is attributed to Vitthalnatha and is taken from *The Stories of Two Hundred Fifty-two Vaishnavas*:

“Once upon a time Kalyana Bhatta requested Gosainjee to describe to him the characteristics of a true devotee of the Lord. To this the latter replied as follows: “A true devotee is one who has in his heart charity for all. He is never angry with his fellow-believers and he is forbearing in regard to any offence committed against him by these. Even if any one were to insult him he should not mind it, nor should he allow his spirit to be disturbed by it. He should always speak humbly and sweetly to all and speak the truth. He should fix his mind on the Lord and keep his mind pure. He should help others. He should not in any case quarrel with other devotees of God and should have control over his senses. He should not let others know that he is a devotee of God. While preparing for the service (worship) of the Lord, he should not let his mind wander. He should not eat much, for that brings on sleep and thereby one is hindered in his worship and praise of the Lord. Besides, eating much brings on disease and that causes hindrance in one’s devotion to God. Both mind and senses should be controlled, for it is necessary to do this for fixing one’s heart on God. He should always believe himself to be a servant of the Lord. He should not join the people of the world in talking of worldly things, and should mind always the things of God. He should not tell the secret things of God to any but the true devotees. He should never give up patience. Hunger, thirst, cold, anger and covetousness, knowing all these as enemies, he should beware of them and never surrender himself to them. He should never be proud and should have respect for the devotees of God, knowing these to be so many forms of God. He should constantly think of his former condition, and then think of the change that has been wrought in him by the grace of God, and knowing thus the great mercy of God should offer Him his



praise and love. The man who has these qualities in him is a true devotee of God."

We might also add here that Ethics as such have no independent place of their own in this branch of Vaishnavism. In this it is in full agreement with the Vaishnavism of Sri Chaitanya. The Ethics of both these religious movements are an integral part or only a corollary of their religious life, and they are wholly subordinated to the latter. Their aim is to look Godward altogether and their relations with men are to be regulated by this and this alone. Whatever helps devotion to God is to be retained while everything else is to be eschewed. This ideal of Ethics makes their virtues theological and not human. From this it must not be supposed that they are indifferent to ethical or moral life. Rather both of them presuppose Ethics or start where these end. In connection with this we might well quote the following words of the Rev. Fr. P. Johannes, a Roman Catholic scholar and philosopher, from his small book on the teachings of Vallabha. What he says is all the more valuable because he writes the book from the Christian and the Catholic point of view. This is what he says:

"It is however in his practical philosophy that we find the most valuable contribution of Vallabha. It is even in his school that we meet with the perfect definition of the love of God, for it states that we must love God for His own sake and ourselves and everything else for the sake of God. A better definition is impossible.

"Moreover Vallabha has brought divine love as close as possible to another theological virtue, that of divine trust or hope. For despising all the self-trust which is so conspicuous in the *Karma* and the *Jnana* ways, he invites us to build on trust in God alone. "God," he says, "must be the end and means of our love. We must expect our salvation from the fact that it is more, infinitely more, the concern of God than our own. The best means of salvation is the attitude that is implied in the *Mantra* 'Let God be my refuge.'"



“And this unselfish hope or trust is again based on the virtue of faith.

“We thus discover in Vallabha true union with God by faith, hope and charity. His religious teaching may be summed up: try to refer yourself to God by faith, hope and charity, surrender wholesale and turn all that you are and have into an instrument of divine grace by a sincere consecration, and God will lift you to His own plane. The efficacy of divine grace comes out most beautifully in his system. Grace works by itself, provided we open ourselves to it by the wholesale surrender implied in our consecration.

“Lastly the goal to which Vallabha invites us is the highest possible. It is nothing less than a formal participation in the very life of God, Beatific Vision. For Vallabha maintains that at the end we shall know God in Himself, in His own Light and Warmth.”

The testimony given here is all the more important because it comes from one whose main object in writing his books on some of the Hindu religious teachers is to commend the doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church to the Hindu mind.

## CHAPTER VI

### Aberrations and Abuses

The religious movement, which we have described so far in what may seem to some glowing colours, has given rise to certain misgivings and misconceptions in the mind of the general public. This is true to such an extent that a number of our friends, both Indian and European, were surprised that we should have taken in hand the writing of the present book. Serious criticism of the movement began about a century after Vallabha, and it grew until the matters came to a climax in the *Maharaja Libel Case*. It then received a blow from which it took long to recover. Things were getting better and the Church of Vallabha was beginning to face the world with sufficient self-respect when only a few years ago the late Damodarlaljee, the then head of the shrine of Sri Nathjee and as such the most important person of the Church, contracted publicly a sort of marriage with a dancing-girl and gave the movement another severe blow. This naturally gave rise to a grave scandal and revived many of the memories concerning its past history.

The chief and almost the sole charge brought against this Church is that of sexual immorality. The first attack made on it on this score took place as early as Samvata 1695 (1639 A. D.) in a drama called *Pakhanda Dharma Nataka*, The Drama of Heretical Religion, written by one Damodar Swami. It was written with the

avowed purpose of bringing into discredit the new movement, which it did by charging it with the practice of gross immorality in the name of religion. It used strong language and spoke of "eating and drinking" "carnal intercourse with females night and day", "the consecration of a daughter, a son's wife and a wife" etc, as its characteristic features. It is doubtful if the drama was ever put on the stage, and printing being then unknown it could not have got much publicity. In all likelihood there is an element of exaggeration in it due to sectarian bias, but there must have been some evil to give rise to an attack of this kind.

A similar charge was brought forward by the Gujarati poet Samala Bhatta about two and a half centuries back in one of his poems. He had a keen sense of observation of human character and traits, which made him highly realistic. He was, besides, something of an ethical teacher, who felt it to be a mission of his life to teach people morals by means of poetry. This makes his criticism free from sectarian bias and therefore more valuable. He describes the male members of Vallabha's Church as having become effeminate.

About the same time there flourished in Gujarata another poet called Akho, one of the noblest of philosophical and religious teachers this Province has known. His poetry is full of deep spiritual wisdom and is unique in Gujarati literature. Indeed, it is difficult to find its match anywhere for condensed thought, apt illustration and profound mystical experience, all fused together in a harmonious whole. In the guise of a poet he is a true prophet, teaching true religion and ethics in every line of his poetry. He was at first a member of Vallabha's Church, but failing to find his satisfaction in it, he left it and ultimately found rest for his spirit in the Vedanta of Shankara. He is, however, free from bias of any kind and spares none in his criticism. This makes his remarks on the Vallabha Sampradaya all the more valuable. He knew it from within and had no soft corner for anything evil, wherever it

be. In view of this it is worth noting that the following is all that he says in regard to Vallabha's Church:

I made Gokulnatha my Guru:  
This was like putting a string  
in the nostrils of an old bullock.  
One who deprives his disciple of his wealth,  
But not of his load (of sin),  
What salvation can such a Guru give ?

It is significant that he does not speak of the evil of immorality in this Church.

Another poet of Gujarata, Krishnaram, who lived after Akho, criticised the Vallabha Sampradaya in the manner of Samala Bhatta. His charge against it is that it is heterodox in its belief and he finds in it the same defects that were pointed out by Samala.

In the beginning of the nineteenth century there appeared in Gujarata Sri Swami Narayana, one of the greatest Vaishnava teachers and reformers of all times. He worked in Kathiawad, Cutch and Gujarata for thirty years, during which period he created and led one of the most powerful movements of the Bhagavata Dharma. The late Justice Mahadeva Govinda Ranade spoke of him as the last of the great Hindu Acharyas, putting him thus in a line with Ramanuja, Madhva, Vallabha etc. Few religious teachers in the history of the world have been so particular as he about the purity of sexual relations between men and women. It is all the more surprising, therefore, that there is little mention in the large body of literature belonging to his movement of sexual immorality in the Vallabha Sampradaya. Swami Narayana's chief crusade was directed against *Vama Marga*, the left-handed Cult of Sakti. He knew the dangers that attended the cult of Bhakti of the amatory kind and warned his disciples against it again and again. He secured a number of disciples from Vallabha's Church as from every other religious

community The thing relevant to the subject we are dealing with here, however, is that it is but rarely that we find any mention of this particular evil in Vallabha's Church in the writings of his Sampradaya. This is all the more remarkable since his was a rival Church.

The first serious and definite charge against Vallabha's movement was made by Capt. MacMurdo, the British Resident in Cutch, in about 1820 A. D. This is what he says:

"The Bhatias are of Sindh origin. They are the most numerous and wealthy merchants in the country, and worship the Gosainjee Maharajas, of whom there are many. The Maharaj is the master of their property, and disposes of it as he pleases; and such is the veneration in which he is held, that the most respectable families consider themselves honoured by his cohabiting with their wives and daughters."

There appeared a little later a book called *Kashi Namah*, An Account of Kashi (Benares), in Persian, written by one Munshi Shilal Sheikh. It was translated and published in 1854 by Mr. Frederick Hall, a Professor of the Government College in Benares. This book contains among other things the following:

"The Gokula Gosainjees: They are generally known by the name of Gokulnatha. In all their outward appearance they are like the Banraban (Brindaban) Gosains,\* and they apply the Kaslika§ in a different way, and their followers are mostly Gujarati grocers (banias), who carry on the business of the Mahajans (bankers). Few other people are inclined to become their followers. Their followers, whether men or women, at the time of becoming their followers, make an offering to the Guru, of these three things, viz, body,

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\* These are the leaders of the Chaitanya Sampradaya.

§ A mark made on the forehead with a particular kind of clay or some kind of powder as a sign of one's belonging to a particular Sampradaya.



mind and wealth—that is, for his service and gratification, and they withhold not from him their bodies, heart and gold. Men and women unfailingly go once every day, and some of them three times, in order to behold the face of their spiritual guide, or the adored Child (the Image). And, besides this, they are so firm in their good faith, that when they marry, they first send their wives to their spiritual guide without having made use of them; and the leavings of their accomplished guides are afterwards tasted by the ignorant disciples.....The food and drink of these Gosains are delicious and luxurious, and most of them are wealthy.”

Both these statements are rather significant since they come from almost the two ends of India. This shows that the evil had become fairly prevalent. Whatever may have been the case at this stage, it became suddenly concentrated in Bombay in the fifties of the last century. There were many reasons for this growth. The city of Bombay, beginning its life only about a century and half back, had become the wealthiest place in Western India. People from Cutch, Kathiawar and Gujarata flocked to it in large numbers and they built up much of the trade there. Among these the Bhatias were one of the most prominent communities. An intelligent and clever people, and having some religious zeal, they had adopted the new faith in a body almost, if not altogether. They lacked, besides, the strong puritanic tradition behind them which the Banias had. A large number of these latter had adopted Vallabha's Vaishnavism, but with them it was not a matter of mass-movement as with the Bhatias. They were too well-grounded in the older culture to be swept off their feet. They kept up, besides, their social connections with those members of their communities who had not joined the new faith. This constrained them to observe many of the old conventions. The Bhatias, on the other hand, came to social prominence simultaneously with their adoption of the new faith, which was hardly conducive to the best interests of their religious life.

The rise of Bombay in wealth and prosperity brought a large number of Vaishnavas to the city, who are said to have been as many as fifty thousand in the middle of the last century. There appeared together with these about a dozen of the Maharajas, who made Bombay their head-quarters. This was a new feature in the life of the movement. Both the Vaishnavas and the Maharajas had been cut off from their old moorings to some extent by this exodus to Bombay, and the sudden influx of wealth, of which the Vaishnavas and especially the Bhatias had a good share, had a demoralising effect on them all. To this was added the removal of a number of healthy checks, which were always in operation in Native States to prevent any undue growth of religious or social abuses. No Prince in any State would have tolerated long the things that took place in Bombay. A number of stray cases of religious abuse had taken place in territories belonging to some of the Princes, with the result that the evil had been put down with a heavy hand by them. They did not hesitate to exile or imprison the Maharajas involved in the abuse. The British Government, on the other hand, because of its alien character, was afraid of taking steps that might be misconstrued as undue interference with the religious life of the people.

The evil was largely centred round the Maharajas and had assumed a religious character almost. Many a woman became a willing prey to their lasciviousness, thinking it a privilege to be honoured by them in this manner. Possibly in some cases newly-married girls were sent to them before they saw their husbands. Things grew so bad that the Bhatias, meeting together in a body in 1855 A. D., passed a resolution that their women should not be allowed to go to the temples except at certain hours when they could not see the Maharajas in private. This had no effect and things went on as before. There arose, however, a body of reformers among the Vaishnavas, who banded themselves together for the purpose of eradicating this evil from their community and Church. The general public also became much interested in this reform and

strong criticism of the evil appeared in a number of papers. Those were the days when the British Government had just established schools and colleges in India, and new ideas from the West concerning political, social and religious reform and liberty had begun to circulate all over the land.

It was at this juncture of time that the matter was seriously taken in hand by Karsondas Mooljee, who was then a young man of twenty-six or seven years. A Bania by caste he belonged by birth to the Vallabha Sampradaya. He boldly came to the front and openly asked the Maharajas to desist from their immoralities. He did this through the instrumentality of his paper, *Satya-Prakash*, The Light of Truth. He was ably supported in this work by the famous poet Narmadashankar of Gujarata, who had put himself forward as a leader of reform in all directions. The attack made thus was too public to be ignored, but the Maharajas not knowing what to do and having an uneasy conscience fled in a body from the city of Bombay. At this stage, a Maharaja, called Jadunatha, who had no *locus standi* in the city since his head-quarters were in Surat, stepped into the arena and instituted legal proceedings against Karsondas. The case lasted for several days in the High Court of Bombay, and a number of Bhatias came forward to attest to the truth of the charges made by Karsondas against the Maharajas in general and Judunatha in particular. Karsondas had no desire to single him out, but since he instituted the case, Karsondas had to prove that he was no exception. The case was ably contested on both sides by eminent English counsels, and it being the first of its kind, aroused the keenest of public interest all over India. The Maharajas prejudiced their case badly from the start by making an attempt to forbid the Vaishnavas from giving evidence against them. The Bhatias who were the leading Vaishnava community, assembled and passed a resolution to this effect. This led to some of the chief men among them being charged with Conspiracy to defeat the ends of justice by refusing to give evidence. They were tried in the High Court and found guilty. The Libel Case thus started with a handicap against the Maharajas.

In the proceedings of the Libel Suit all sorts of filthy details concerning the immoral practices of the Maharajas were brought to light. Judunatha's private character was raked and found to be little better than that of his fellow-Maharajas. The hearing lasted for twenty-four days, in the course of which dozens of witnesses were examined on both sides. In the judgement the two Judges, who tried the case, concurred in holding that Karsondas was entirely justified in writing his article for the benefit of public morals. They differed, however, in regard to the defendant's plea of not guilty, the Puisne Judge holding that the article was an attack not on the private character of the plaintiff but on his public character as a Maharaja, while the Chief Judge held it to be one on his private character. The verdict was given accordingly by the court in favour of the defendant on the chief issue of justification and with costs, and in favour of the plaintiff on the first plea of not guilty without costs. The defendant was required to pay a nominal fine of Rs. 5 for this offence, while the plaintiff had to pay him Rs. 11500 by way of costs. The verdict was thus on the whole a moral victory for Karsondas and it was hailed as such by the entire educated public.

There are a number of important features of this case which we might well discuss here. The most significant charge of Karsondas against the movement of Vallabha was that the immoral practices of the Maharajas were an integral part of the teachings of the sect. Our own reading of much of the literature of this Church has convinced us beyond a shadow of doubt that this was without any foundation whatsoever. Karsondas was honest in believing the truth of what he said, but he was wholly ignorant of the Samskrit literature of the sect, which alone contained the important teachings of most of the leaders thereof. The tragedy of the case, however, lay in the fact that the Maharajas themselves, being blissfully ignorant of the same, failed entirely to bring out the true character of their faith. Their ignorance is amazing indeed and it well shows how the movement had degenerated. Karsondas brought forward only one text to prove his charge, a sentence from a



commentary on *Siddhanta-Rahasya* of Vallabha made by his grandson Gokulnatha. This commentary was written in Samskrit, but the sentence was taken from a translation of the same in *Vraja bhasha*. The original stands thus:

“Therefore, in the beginning, even before ourselves enjoying, wives, sons etc., should be dedicated because of the expression “all things.” After marriage, even before ourselves using her, (the wife should be dedicated to God). On all occasions, and on account of all occasions, the thing to be used on that occasion should be dedicated. It is after such dedication that every act is to be done.”

This is as clear as it could be. The author gives expression to one of the noblest principles of human conduct, which is to dedicate everything we do or receive or enjoy to Krishna Who, to him, is no other than God Himself. The word *Acharya*, meaning Teacher, which stands for the Maharaja, was added to this text in a Marathi book called *Kavi Charitra*, Biographical Sketches of Poets, some of the material for which was supplied by the poet Narmadashankar. It was on this text that much of the charge was based. This was a mistake and it was held to be such by both the Judges who tried the case. Judunatha, however, failed to bring out enough authorities from the literature of his sect to prove that its belief in Bhakti, even when it was compared at its best with illicit love, never contemplated practising it in the human realm, and that it had in view nothing but a state of love which was *alaukika*, supernatural. This was due in all probability to the fact that the Maharajas themselves and their friends had no real understanding of their faith. They had, besides, perverted such teaching to serve their own human and sub-human purposes. The result was that they failed altogether to prove that the religion of Vallabha as established by him was free from carnality. This would have shown their own practices in the sharpest of contrasts to the original teaching of their sect, and they would have stood condemned by their own mouth. As it was, they allowed the good



name of Vallabha himself to be dragged down to their own level. Unfortunately for the Church of Vallabha, the High Court itself did not have any expert translator of Samskrit or Vraja Bhasha, there being no provision made then for such.

Another charge brought forward by Karsondas was that the Vaishnavas also were practising immorality in accordance with the teaching of the sect. This was said to be done in a kind of secret body called *Rasa Mandali*, in which the Vaishnavas, both men and women, after reading some scriptural book belonging to the sect and after partaking of holy food, indulged in promiscuous intercourse. This matter did not form a part of the plaint, but was discussed in the Court incidentally. Only one witness testified to the existence of associations of this kind, whereas several others denied having ever heard of them. The witness for the defendant weakened his testimony by his admission that he had been present at only one of these meetings more than two decades back, he being then a boy of only ten or eleven years. He made his testimony still worse by saying that the books commonly read at such times were the stories of Eighty-four and Two Hundred fifty-two Vaishnavas. These books are so harmless that they are the last things people meeting for such a purpose would read. In all probability the belief in meetings of this kind was in nature similar to many held in ancient and modern times concerning several good and evil faiths. Christianity had to suffer much from such beliefs held about it by its opponents, whether Jews or non-Jews, especially the latter, for centuries after it came to birth. The Jews had to suffer similarly at the hands of Christians especially for nearly fifteen hundred years. The hearing of the Maharaja Libel Case incidentally proved that the evil was centred chiefly round the Maharajas and that the Vaishnavas as a body were free from it.

One more aspect of the Libel Case remains to be discussed. This was the part played in it by the well-known Christian missionary, the Rev. Dr. John Wilson of Bombay. He was, according to

his own evidence, extremely interested in the case and helped Karsondas, whom he came to know after the Libel proceedings had started, in every way. He knew both Samskrit and Vraja-bhasha, and was undoubtedly the most scholarly man among the witnesses on both sides. He was thus the person most fitted to understand the true character of the teachings of Vallabha. So interested was he, however, in running down this movement in his zeal for social and religious reform in India and especially for the propagation of his own faith that he did not make the least effort to know what Vallabha had taught. On the other hand he readily believed all that was said against it by its opponents. He came thus furnished with plenty of material drawn from various sources to prove that the Church of Vallabha was evil both in its origin and growth. He was so deeply prejudiced against it that he understood the term *Pusti*, which to Vallabha meant nothing but life and growth in God through His grace, as 'enjoyment in a natural and a carnal sense.' He aimed at showing that Vallabha's movement was not a proper form of Hinduism, that it was impure in its original teaching as well as in its practice at that time, and that it was little better than *Vama-Marga*, the left-handed cult of Sakti, which allowed all sorts of vile practices to be carried on in the name of religion. He could not maintain any of these positions in his cross-examination, proving himself to be wholly blinded by his religious prejudices. He was offended at the Church of Vallabha because it did not practise renunciation of the world, which, to his mind, was of the essence of Hinduism. The Christian missionaries have all along attacked Hinduism for what they call its negative attitude towards life, and when they see a religious movement which is positive in its faith, it too must be of the Devil in their eyes. This was similar to what was done by the Jews who, according to the words of Jesus, were

“Like children sitting in the market-place and calling to one another,

‘We piped to you and you would not dance, we lamented and you would not weep.’

For John the Baptist has come, eating no bread and drinking no wine, and you say ‘He has a devil’:

The Son of man has come eating and drinking and you say ‘Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax-gatherers and sinners’ ”

There is no doubt that the Libel Case conclusively proved that there were gross abuses of the teaching of Vallabha, and that it was perverted by the Maharajas to pander to their own pleasure and vices. This was true especially in Bombay where owing to a number of causes things had assumed their worst aspect. The sudden influx of wealth, the greater freedom of women, the city-life, the policy of *laisse-faire* in social and religious matters adopted by the British Government etc, were helpful to the growth of the evil.

The evil was, however, of an older date and we might now trace a little its origin. We have shown already that the ideal of Bhakti preached by Vallabha was in some respects higher than that of the preceding Acharyas. In this matter both he and Chaitanya went beyond what had been done before. Vallabha went a step further in his great and almost absolute emphasis on the grace of God in his Bhakti-Marga. We must remember here the fact that the higher a thing is, the more liable it is to abuse. This is in virtue of the inherent depravity of human nature which brings down everything to its own level. It is a cardinal doctrine of Vallabha’s Church that human nature in its very constitution is depraved and wicked. Vallabha and all the great authors of his Church whom we have mentioned in the foregoing pages say this with reiterated emphasis. Now the doctrine of grace is especially liable to abuse. We find this in the history of Christianity, where within almost a quarter of century after Jesus had left the world,

St. Paul warns the Christians against such abuse. There were some among them who were already beginning to say to themselves, if not to others, the words which St. Paul puts in their mouth, viz., "Let us sin more so that the grace of God may abound more." Since the path of Bhakti is one of love and grace, it casts out the fear of God, which may not be always wholesome. This has been proved again and again in the history of Religions believing in the God of love. This does not mean that we should cease to have faith in God who is the Father or the Mother or the Friend, but that we should so strengthen our faith and belief that it may not degenerate into sentimentality.

The belief in the grace of God carries with it as an integral part thereof that of extreme humility on the part of man. The greater the experience of such grace, the greater is the humility of the devotee. This is one of the essential features of Bhakti-Marga. The only authentic writing of Sri Chaitanya, a poem of about eight verses, stands as follows:

1 Your all-pervading power is multiplied by your own name, and there is no fixed time for remembering it. Such kindness from you, O powerful One, to my misfortune, has not caused love to grow in me.

2 Humbler than the grass, more patient than a tree, honouring others yet without honour for one-self: such a one is ever worthy to take the name of Krishna.

3 O Lord of the world, I do not want wealth, or relations, or beautiful wife, or poetic genius: may I have birth after birth disinterested and pure faith in you !

4 When will my eyes overflow with tears, my voice get choked and my body thrill with joy at the chanting of your name ?

5 My moments are lengthened into cycles, and my eyes are turned into the rainy season itself; the world to me is entirely empty because of my separation from Govinda (Krishna).

6 May the praise of Sri Krishna be triumphant, which cleanses the mirror of the mind, extinguishes the great forest-fire of the world, sheds moonlight upon the lily of prosperity, lives in its beloved knowledge, smells the sea of joy, gives the full taste of pure nectar at every step and washes the entire self of one !

7 O Son of Nanda, graciously count me your servant as a particle of dust on your lotus-feet, fallen as I am in the awful ocean of this world.

8 Even if He lifts and crushes me under His foot, or cuts me to the quick by avoiding me, or treats me the profligate in any way whatsoever, He is still the Lord of my heart.\*

We find the same humility in the writings of Vallabha, Vitthalnatha, Harirai and all the important authors of this Church. It is in fact the essence of the Bhakti-Marga. But the belief in and the experience of the grace of God is the most personal part of one's religious life, and it is a thing which can not be inherited from birth. Hence the Vaishnavism of Vallabha, like every other religious movement, took the first downward step when it became a matter of inheritance to many of its followers. This step in its case produced unfavourable results in proportion to its emphasis on the personal experience of God and His grace.

These consequences were added to by the belief in hereditary Guruism on the part of Vallabha's Church. In the history of religion, such a priesthood, let alone Guruism, has been found fraught with much evil. It may have been necessary and even essential in the early stages of human history, but almost every reform, at least in those periods, had its origin in the removal of abuses connected with its authority and power. In the present movement the evil grew worse owing to its belief in hereditary *Guruism*. The descendants of Vallabha came to be recognised as

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\* This translation of the original is given here from the book *The Chaitanya Movement* by M. T. Kennedy.



the sole Gurus and Acharyas of the new Church, not in virtue of their spiritual qualities but solely because of their birth. They came to be looked upon as even Incarnations of Krishna as God, which was still worse. Such titles as *Purna Purushottama* (The Perfect Person), *Maha-Prabhu* (The Great Lord), Kahan (Krishna), etc., were freely applied to them as a matter of course. A kind of cult sprang up around them, which they as well as their followers looked upon as an integral part of their faith. This evil grew in all probability slowly, step by step, without any one being conscious of it. Hinduism, more than any other religion, has recognised the need of a living teacher, finding in the latter the basis for all personal religion. This is hero-worship at its highest, and if the Hero or the Guru be of the right kind, perhaps few things are more helpful to the spiritual growth of a man than such worship. On the other hand nothing could be more fatal to one's religious life if the Guru be an unworthy person, and this is just what happened in the case of this Church.

Vallabha was fully conscious of this fact. He had said again and again that the Brahmins, i. e. the hereditary priests and gurus of the Hindus, did not deserve to be respected, much less to be revered and worshipped, since they did not show in themselves the divine qualities required of them by the divine Scriptures. Once a question was put to him by some Brahmins as to why they should not be worshipped in place of the *Salagrama* and Images. His reply to this was that it was because they had lost their true Brahminhood and holiness in Treta-Yuga (the Age next to the Satya-Yuga), Image-worship was resorted to by the people. In the Kali-Yuga, according to him, things had become worse since all people had become evil and wicked: (*Nibandha* 212-214). In his *Shruti-Gita* 27-28 he clearly says that God alone is to be worshipped since it is not easy to detect His presence in human souls, and that He may be more properly worshipped in things rather than in human beings. The proper kind of *Guru* is described by him thus:

Ever ready in the worship of Krishna,  
 And free from such evil qualities as hypocrisy etc:  
 One who knows the essence of Sri Bhagavata,  
 Such alone should be served.

When asked what one should do if such a Guru is not found, he said:

Failing to find such a one,  
 One should make for himself an Image of God,  
 And serve Him in the Image,  
 For God abides therein.

*Nibandha 227*

In close conformity with this teaching, he allowed some of his non-Brahmin disciples to administer even the rite of initiation to would-be disciples. Besides, he does not seem to have instituted any succession of Gurus by descent in his family. We have already seen how Vitthalnatha had to organise almost everything anew so far as the Sampradaya was concerned. In this matter, in all probability, he was influenced, to some extent at least, by the example of the Sampradaya of Sri Chaitanya. The title of Goswami or Gosainjee was used by the teachers of the latter first, and it was from them that it was taken by Vitthalnatha. More than one disciple of Chaitanya had established the succession of Gurus in their families, setting thus an example for Vallabha's Church. It was easier for the latter to do this since the founder of the faith was himself a householder and had a family of his own. If the disciples of Chaitanya could do this, why could not the descendants of Vallabha do the same? Besides, the head-quarters of some of the Gurus of the Chaitanya Sampradaya was Vrandavana, which was only next door to Gokula where Vitthaleshwara had settled. The descendants of Vallabha came to be recognised in course of time as Gokulesha Gosains to distinguish them from the Vrandavana Gosains of the Chaitanya sect. The latter had already come

to be recognised as Prabhus and Maha-Prabhus, a title which the former took from them in order not to be left behind in the race for religious honours. This is how things grew, almost unconsciously and inch by inch, and were in full force before the people knew where they were.

Thus grew the evil of Guruism and even Avatarism, and with the rise of the Church in numbers, power and prestige, the Acharyas adopted the title of the Maharajas, which means Great Lords or Princes. They adopted in both their private and public life all the paraphernalia of royalty. This is how the cult of the Maharajas grew in Vallabha's movement. All the males born in Vallabha's family came to be looked upon from their birth as divine, and being surrounded with an atmosphere of such a belief from their childhood, they did not know anything better. Then came inertia, the worst enemy of humanity, and it took hold of the entire movement. After such great teachers as Harirai, Purshottamrai, Gopeshwara etc., had passed away, there were but few, if any, who knew anything of the original writings of the Church, much less their meaning. These works were hidden away in the coffers of the Maharajas, none knowing what they stood for. The ignorance of the followers of Vallabha in regard to these was colossal as was but too evident in the proceedings of the Libel Case.

Vallabha's Church had another serious difficulty to cope with. This arose from the fact that it had no order of monks. Even the Church of Sri Chaitanya, so similar to it in many respects, had several orders of monks and nuns. It is true these came to be demoralised in course of time, but there were bound to be among them some individuals always who were wholly devoted to the cause and who, by their holy life, kept the faith unsullied. They provided a most important element in the life of the Church which counteracted the undue pretensions of the Acharyas. The laity knew that these Sannyasis or Sadhus had given up the world, and that as such and especially when their life was pure, they were more worthy

of honour than the Acharyas, who had often nothing else but the descent by blood to commend them. This has been also the case with the latest Vaishnava movement of Gujarata, viz., the Swami Narayana Sampradaya. To take a parallel from the Christian Church, the Roman Catholic Church had been demoralised for centuries, and the abuses that had crept into it were as bad as those in the Church of Vallabha, if not worse. Nevertheless, the Reformation of Luther had hardly begun when Ignatius Loyola created a new and powerful body of monks in the form of the Society of Jesus and changed the entire course of Roman Catholicism. There was nothing corresponding to any of these Vaishnava or Christian orders in the Church of Vallabha. This was a serious handicap to it and consequently the Maharajas became the sole masters of the laity. It is true there were a few people called *Viraktas*, who were like the Sadhus, but they were not bound together in any definite organisation, nor were they under any special discipline. Those who were earnest among them remained indifferent to what was going on around them, while others, who were akin to professional beggars pandered to the passions of the Maharajas and helped in the growth of the general depravity.

Another dangerous element in the faith of Vallabha lay in its belief in Bhakti as *Sringara*, sex-love of the romantic kind. In its origin, this was something great and divine as we have described elsewhere in the present work, but it was playing with fire to cherish such devotion. The great leaders of the movement, while teaching such love to God, had repeatedly said that it was to be kept a secret from those who had not reached the necessary stage to attain it by means of a holy and spiritual life. It had, however, leaked out and become universal property. Just before the Libel Suit was instituted, Jadunatha himself had written of such Bhakti, advocating it openly as the highest form of devotion. He thus added fire to the fuel. Such love for God as taught by Vallabha etc., was *Alaukika*, supernatural, having nothing of the carnal element in it. But with the growth of the belief in the



Maharajas as divine beings came the belief that whatever they did was divine. Some Maharajas, thus, instead of rising to the level of the original teaching, brought it down to that of their own. Aestheticism, which was such a notable feature of Vallabha's movement, was also prostituted to unworthy ends with the result that things all round became so bad that Pusti-Marga, so lofty in its origin, became synonymous with Epicureanism. It is in the nature of most movements to degenerate in course of time and the present one proved no exception to the rule. This is why there is constant need of vigilance and reform, and violent reform at that, which is just what happened in the case of this Church. The evil had grown to such dimensions that it could not have been remedied but by the hammer-strokes of the young and intrepid Karsondas. Unconscious as he was of the fact, he rendered a most valuable service to the cause of Vallabha. The severe blows that he administered to the Church cut at the root of the evil, and the light let into the life of the body during the course of the hearing of the Libel Case and its aftermath cleared much of the miasma that had hung round the movement. For all this the Church of Vallabha should ever remain grateful to him.

Unfortunately the youthful reformer could not follow up the work he had so bravely started. He had raised too big a barrier between himself and his fellow-believers for him to be able to help them much. He was, besides, anything but a religious reformer. A pioneer as he was in the cause of reform in Gujarata, religious work was not in his line, and he wisely abstained from it. He is said to have written a book called *The Sect of the Maharajas*, which was published in 1865. This work does not contain his name as its author, but is, however, attributed to him. It is said to have been revised thoroughly by an "English friend" of his, who was perhaps no other than Dr. Wilson. In all probability it was the latter who had much to do with its origin as well as publication. It is written on the lines of the defence made by Karsondas in the



Libel Case, painting the entire Church of Vallabha in the darkest of colours. It is altogether negative and destructive in its character, no attempt whatsoever being made to understand the movement as it was in its origin. As the title itself implies, it takes the practices prevailing at the time in the Church as the essence of the faith, the sole purpose of the alleged author or the man behind him being to discredit the movement as much as possible. The book bears on it unmistakably the mark of missionary mentality, and was written and used for the purpose of showing Hinduism in one of its worst aspects. It became an important weapon in the armoury of missionary propaganda concerning the people of India, helping to show them up as stricken with 'moral plague'.

On the other hand the Church of Vallabha was too stunned by the blow it had received to do anything immediately to retrieve its legitimate position, much less its honour. It had lost its face completely, for the time being at any rate, and it became a by-word for religious corruption and depravity. One good result of the Libel Suit was that the Maharajas put themselves into the background and that the laity came to its own. The latter naturally began to ask the question whether what had passed for the teaching of the faith for some decades past was the thing taught by Vallabha. The fierce light of public criticism, brought to bear upon the movement, and the awful exposures made in the course of the hearing of the case convinced them thoroughly that what was not consistent with morals and ethics could not be religion. Jadunatha had himself admitted, besides, in the trial that though the Maharajas were worshipped in a way by the followers of the faith, they were not the incarnations of Krishna. This was a very important point gained in the proper understanding of the faith, and it created further interest in the origins of the movement.

It took some decades before the Church of Vallabha could face the world again squarely. The spread of education among its followers and the study of Samskrit, in which much of the literature

of the movement is enshrined, gradually brought about much reform. The backward condition of the Church, however, can be realised from the fact that it took more than half a century after the Libel Suit for a book defending the original teaching of Vallabha in a comprehensive manner with special reference to that case, to appear. This was written by Ranchhoddas Patwari, an able lawyer and enthusiastic follower of the Church, in three small volumes. In the first two of these he gave a systematic exposition of the teaching of Vallabha, while in the last he answered a number of questions raised by the Libel Suit. Since then a substantial part of the original literature has been published, and it has proved itself most helpful in vindicating the true character of Vallabha's faith. The Church can now stand the full glare of day without shame or fear of any kind. It has been seen now beyond a shadow of doubt that whatever evils were found in the movement were in no way integral to the teaching of Vallabha, and that they were but a sad travesty thereof.

It is worth noting that the movement of Vallabha has received no permanent set-back as the result of the Libel Suit. If anything, it has grown stronger than ever. It was said in the course of the hearing of the Libel Suit that the number of the followers of the faith then was about two hundred thousand. This seems to have been a serious under-estimate. To-day they are said to be anything from two to eight millions. The latter figure seems to be an over-estimate. Very likely the number is somewhere between four and five millions. The followers belong to various classes and communities, some of which are as respectable as any in the whole of India. Among these are Banias, Bhatias, Lohanas, a good sprinkling of Brahmins and others, all of whom put as high a premium on domestic and social purity as any body of people. Mahatma Gandhi himself comes from a family which has professed and practised the faith of Vallabha for centuries. This Church has thus stood the test of time, revealing thereby a spiritual vitality which is sure to last for ages to come.

The brightest feature of the Vaishnavism of Vallabha to-day is that devotion to God, high moral character and learning are being increasingly recognised as the true characteristics of its followers. Apart from these even the Maharajas themselves can claim little respect from the laity. Even the term *Maharajas* is not much in evidence now. They must prove themselves to be descendants of Vallabha, not merely by blood but by spirit, if they want to claim any special privileges for themselves. This was amply proved recently in the case of the late Damodarlal, the head of this Church. This matter is so important for the valuable principles involved in it that we might look at it a little more in detail.

We have already seen that the Image of Sri Nathjee was given by Vitthalnatha to his eldest son. It has remained ever since with the family of the latter, the eldest son inheriting it each successive generation by the right of primogeniture. This Image was removed from the Vraja-land owing to the fear of Moslem persecution under Aurangzebe in Samvata 1724 (1668 A. D.), and was brought to Mewar by stages in 1726 (1670 A. D.). It has been here ever since in a place called Nathdwara, a town situated in the territory of the Udaipur State. This State has given this shrine protection all along, and endowed it, besides, in a handsome manner. This shrine, being the chief one for the Vaishnavas of this Church, has been receiving rich gifts all along, because of which it is immensely wealthy. It has also large properties in British India and in some other Native States. The person in charge of this shrine is known as Tilakayata.

About a decade back, Damodarlal was declared unfit to succeed his father as the Tilakayata because of his reckless behaviour and marriage with Hamsa. This last act of his not only violated all the principles of orthodox Hinduism but made it impossible for him to be the head of this Vaishnava Sampradaya. Incidentally we might add here that Damodarlal was an able and highly

talented man, and this marriage of his was not an act of a momentary impulse of a giddy young man. He was then thirty-seven years old and had a wife and some children by her. He also knew full well what the consequences of the marriage would be to him. We might also add that Hamsa, who was a dancing-woman and of about the same age as Damodarlal, was very clever, and that because of this the marriage was not without a touch of romance. Some time after this event took place, Damodarlal's father died making the question of succession an acute one. The Udaipur State recognised Damodarlal's minor son as the successor and appointed a Court of Wards and a Committee to manage the shrine.

Things, however, did not rest here. The shrine of Sri Nathjee has large properties in British India and so Damodarlal instituted a suit in the High Court of Bombay in 1934 for the possession of these. His contention was that the order passed by the Udaipur State was invalid, that his father was the personal owner of these, and that under the Hindu Law all these devolved upon him. This was contended against on behalf of his minor son on the ground that the orders passed by the Udaipur State were valid, and that the properties being the personal possessions of the late Maharaja, they devolved upon him because of his recognition by the State as the successor and the Tilakayata.

At this stage the suit went through a new development. Many Vaishnavas naturally asked the question whether these properties really belonged to the Image itself, or to any Maharaja, especially as suits of this kind have not only been fought in the various High Courts of India but even important decisions have been given thereupon. Accordingly an application was made to the Bombay High Court by a Vaishnava to recognise the Image of Sri Nathjee as a party to the suit. Recognising this claim the High Court added Sri Nathjee as a party and appointed Mr. R. V. Patwari, one of the leading Vaishnavas, to act as the



guardian of the Image. The contention on behalf of the Image was that the position of the Tilakayata was that of a manager only and not that of an owner of the shrine, and that the suit properties belonged to the Image itself. Some time after this Damodarlal withdrew his suit and it was dismissed by the Court with costs. The matter now rested between the minor son and the Image, and the counter-claim filed by Mr. Patwari on behalf of the latter was referred to the sole arbitration of Sir Chimanlal Setalwad by the parties in 1942. After an exhaustive inquiry into the facts of the case, the latter gave his award to the effect was that the position of the Tilakayata was not that of an owner but was that of a manager, and that of the suit-properties only those belonged to him which were given as personal presents, the rest belonging to the Image. These latter amounted nearly to eighty per cent of the whole. Since no one raised any objection to this part of the award, a decree was passed by the High Court on it.

It is worth noting that the part played by the Udaipur State in this matter was a most important one, and that but for its initiative little could have been done to mend matters. This fully bears out what we have said in the earlier part of this chapter viz., that the Native States could act with greater freedom in suppressing abuses connected with religious bodies than the British Government. The latter, being alien both in race and religion, is handicapped in a number of ways from taking any decisive step in matters of this kind. We might also add here that the counter-claim made on behalf of the Image took particular care to see that the suit-properties did not come to be looked upon as Public Charities. The counter-claim was made on the ground that the Tilakayata, though not the owner, was the manager of the shrine and its properties.

It is but natural that a case of this kind which, in one shape or another, went on for years and necessitated the expenditure of



lacs of rupees on both sides, should give rise to many misgivings in the mind of the Vaishnavas themselves. This was all the more so since there was a grave scandal at its back. The eyes of the thoughtful among them have been opened wider than ever, and many people have begun to realize the necessity of reform and thorough-going reform at that. The case has served a very valuable purpose inasmuch as it has laid down a precedent by its recognition of the chief Image of this Sampradaya as being not a piece of property of any one, but as a person in its own right, and giving, indirectly if not directly, the Vaishnavas a stake in it and in the use of its properties.

A noteworthy feature of this case is the fact of the appointment of Mr. Patwari as the guardian of the Image and his acceptance of it. He is an old man of nearly eighty years and has been all his life a strict follower of the Vallabha Sampradaya. We might also add that he is anything but a reformer even in the mildest sense of the term. In spite of all this he fought against what he believed to be the wrongful claims of the Tilakayata to regard himself as the owner of the properties of the shrine, with the enthusiasm of a youth. This shows which way the wind blows in the Church and it is a happy augury of the future.

There are many other signs which show that the movement of Vallabha has awakened from the deep lethargy that had come over it for so long a time. In fact there is a stirring of waters for almost half a century. As early as 1904, a few of the most prominent Vaishnavas of that time thought of holding an all-India Conference of the believers of this Church. The matter was enthusiastically taken up by the late Jivanlalji of Porbandar, a Maharaja of the body. Under his leadership the first Conference was held in 1905, and it continued to be held off and on till 1923. This gave a new impetus to the movement in every direction. Several monthly magazines sprang up, and literary activity on a large scale followed. A number of Sanskrit works of the Sam-

pradaya were published for the first time and their translations etc., appeared in the vernaculars. In this way a lot of good work has been done and the literary impulse is far from exhausted. The Conference created, besides, a good deal of public opinion in regard to the proper management of the Church. Unfortunately, however, this Conference has been in a moribund condition for the last two decades, which means the loss of much valuable time. It now cries out for its immediate resuscitation if the Sampradaya is to make itself felt as a vital spiritual power. These are days of public opinion and democratisation of all activities including the spiritual ones, and no institution can work in a wholesome manner apart from them. A strong laity is the chief desideratum in any religious body and this Sampradaya is no exception to this rule. Moreover, the very genius of Vaishnavism, which in its essence is the religion of the common man and which believes in a way in the priesthood of all believers, demands such democratisation. In order that this may be done properly, a body which creates and concentrates public opinion into itself is essential to the very life of this movement, and we wish that no efforts would be spared by both the Maharajas and the leading persons among the laity to organise one on a permanent basis. In addition to this, it would be in the best interests of the Sampradaya itself to have Committees of Management attached to every temple to help not only in its administrative but religious work as well. In every place which has a *Haveli*, there are bound to be a few persons who could help in such work. They should not only be merely interested in the affairs of the temple, but be made to share in the responsibility of managing them.

We might also make another suggestion which, if followed, would surely help much in the proper conduct of the Sampradaya. Vaishnavism has enfranchised women spiritually as perhaps no other movement among the Hindus has done. In this matter Vallabha went even further than many Vaishnava teachers. He gave the primacy of place to woman in the realm of devotion. According to him

the woman-soul is better fitted to be the ideal devotee than the man-soul. In this belief he was certainly right. It is, therefore, in strict conformity with this that women should have certain rights conferred upon them. Women are working as ministers in the minor acts of service or Seva in the *Havelis*, but this is not enough. They might well be employed for giving initiation to women and this very important branch of the ministry of the Church might be reserved solely for them. To begin with, it may be decided by a general body of all the Vaishnavas that all women and girls should take their *Brahmasambandha* from only the women-folk of the Maharajas' families. This might look at first as an innovation, but in course of time it would be found most helpful to the cause of the Church. This is easier to do inasmuch as the only other important Vaishnava Church in Gujarata, viz., the Swami Narayana Sampradaya, has been following this practice for over a century.

This Church might well do one more thing, which is the most important of all. We have said in this book that this body has lacked in missionary zeal. At any rate the zeal has been far from proportionate to the worth of the message that it has to give. Now it is a recognised law of life and growth for a religious movement that it is living to the extent that it is growing. To be vital in the true sense of the term, it must carry its gospel to those who are outside its pale. Unfortunately very little is done in this direction by this Church. But now that an awakening has come, it might well select a few men who are truly devoted to the cause for the purpose of propagating the faith to the non-believers. Surely the race of men like Damodardas and Chacha Harivamsa is not dead, and if it is, it ought to be revived. There are large communities of people numbering millions who know nothing of this faith, and it is the first duty of the Church to make it known to them. Its gospel of the saving grace of God, if properly preached, might work wonders, even greater than those in the past. To-day there is a revival of Hinduism in some of its highest forms, especially

of the Bhagavata Dharma, and this Sampradaya must do all it can to help in the great work which is going on all over the land. It did a remarkable piece of work in bringing about the Hindu Renaissance in the western part of India at a most difficult time in the history of Hinduism, viz., under the Moslem domination of the country. It can and ought to do the same again on a much larger scale now that the times are more propitious than before. The Hindu Renaissance that is sweeping over the land is urgently calling it along with others to do its utmost, and thereby help in the revival of the best in Hinduism and in the re-construction of the Hindu society in accordance with the same. This is not merely a call of Hinduism but of Religion in general, for the world is passing through perhaps what is nothing less than the greatest struggle between Evil and Good, and it requires, therefore, the help of every religious body.

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BOOK IV

CHAPTER I

**Bhagavata Dharma in Gujarata**

Sri Krishna, who is considered by many to be the founder of the Bhagavata Dharma in India, is said, in the Mahabharata and some of the Puranas, to have lived in Dwarka, the extreme point in Western India. Krishna's name, so far as these ancient books are concerned, is inseparably linked with this place. It was from here that he went to fight on behalf of the Pandavas against the Kauravas. It was here again that he ruled for many years, and remained to the end of his days. In fact, the Krishna of the Mahabharata is primarily that of Dwarka, and his life as depicted therein is that of the King of this place, who was, at the same time, the greatest religious teacher of his times, even the God Incarnate. We are also told in some of these books that Dwarka of Krishna disappeared altogether with him and his people.

Whatever be the truth behind this account of Dwarka, so far no proofs are available from archæological ruins of the historical reality of such a place. The earliest record we have of the existence of the Bhagavata Dharma in territory close to Gujarata, viz., Mewar, dates back to the second or third century B. C.. A Vaishnava temple existed there at that time, and very likely Vaishnavism or rather Vishnu-worship came to Gujarata from that quarter. Definite



historical testimony of the existence of the Bhagavata Dharma in Gujarata proper is found in the 5th century A. D.. The Guptas then ruled over a good part of India, and since they were earnest Bhagavatas, some of them were sure to propagate their faith in the lands that belonged to them. Possibly it was during the period of their rule that the cult of Vishnu came to Su-Rastra, the peninsula now known as Kathiawad. A definite record of this is available, the first of its kind in Saurashtra, in the form of praise of Skanda Gupta inscribed on the Asokan pillar near Junagarh.

The same stone has another inscription on it dating from the 2nd. century B. C.. Therein is given a short account of the tank Sudarshana. This tank was originally excavated by Chandragupta in the 4th. century B. C., repaired and expanded by Asoka, and repaired again by Rudradama. It was repaired again in 456 A. D. by the governor of the province of Surastra appointed by Skandagupta. Along with the mention of this fact, we have that of another viz., the building of a temple dedicated to "Chakradhara (Krishna) who was the God Incarnate". The builder of the temple, called a "house", speaks of himself as one who has "dedicated his life at the feet of Govinda". This temple was in all probability the first Vaishnava temple in Saurashtra as well as Gujarata.

In the following century Saurashtra became independent of the Guptas and was ruled by the royal family of Vallabhis. Most of the princes of this royal house were Shaivas. One of them, Dhruvasen the first, was, however, a "param Bhagavata," to use his own words expressed in an inscription available now. This bears the date of 526 A. D.

For about three centuries more we do not come across any sign of a large prevalence of Vaishnavism in Gujarata. Some ruins dating from the 10th century show that the worship of Vishnu was taking root in Gujarata and Saurashtra. The ruins of temples in two or three places, viz., Kasra, situated at a distance of about

15 miles from Anhilpur Patan, the then capital of Gujarata, and Modhera, together with some plates bearing inscriptions on them, show that the Vishnuism prevailing there was of the Pauranic kind. Along with Vishnu, Brahma and Mahesh (Shiva) were worshipped, and Vishnu was worshipped in all his incarnations. This holds true of the 12th century from the records available of that period. Such signs multiply as we come to the 13th and 14th centuries, showing definitely that Vishnu-worship was common in places so widely apart as Broach, Veraval, Porbandar, Junagadh, Palanpur, Vadnagar etc.

The first available record of Krishna-worship as distinguished from Vishnu-worship in Gujarata belongs to the year 1292 A. D.. It is an inscription mentioning a gift made by Mahantpethad, an officer of Vaghela Sarangadeva stationed in Palanpur, for the purpose of continuing the worship in a temple. This inscription begins with a verse from Gita Govinda, the celebrated Vaishnava poem by Jayadeva of Bengal, who flourished in the 12th century. This shows the existence of a Krishna-temple in Gujarata at that time. It also shows that ideas did not take long in those days to spread from one corner of India to another.

The chief and the most important signs of the spread of Vishnu-worship in Gujarata are found, however, in the two great shrines of Dwarka and Dakore. Though the present Dwarka is said to be different from the one mentioned in the great epic, it was in the fitness of things that a great temple should be raised to Krishna in this place. The shrine here has very properly assumed an all-India importance, it being one of the four great places of pilgrimage in Aryavarta. There are various opinions regarding the time when this town came to be recognised as a place of pilgrimage. Mr. Tansukhram M. Tripathi, a Gujarati scholar, puts it after 1200 A. D..

The temple in Dwarka is large and beautiful, and one of the best in Gujarata. It is situated close to the sea on the bank of

the river Gomti just where it meets the Indian Ocean. It is built on an eminence and the main shrine is 140 ft. high. As one ascends the flight of its well-built steps, the wide view of the sea, the cool breeze blowing all the while, and the high temple facing one, induce in him an elevation of spirit, and the atmosphere within the temple itself adds to the same. The chief Image there is of Krishna bearing the name Ranchhodrai. It is a fine image, and the more one contemplates it, the more it grows upon one. It is worshipped with deep devotion by bands of pilgrims who flock to it from all parts of India. There are smaller temples close to the main one, in which are housed the Images of Trivikramjee and Pradyumnajee, and also of Rukhmani and Satyabhama, the two chief wives of Sri Krishna. There is a *Gadi* (seat) of Shankaracharya within the holy precincts. A small chapel is dedicated to Shiva also. Altogether this is a noble shrine, one of the best not only in Gujarata, but in the whole of India as well.

There is another shrine of Pauranic Vaishnavism in Dakore. The Image there bears the same name, Ranchhodrai, as that of the Image at Dwarka, from where it is believed to have been brought. The event is described as follows. One Vajesingh or Bodana, Rajput by caste, lived in Dakore. He was so deeply devoted to the Deity in Dwarka that he used to go there twice every year. So great was his devotion to Krishna that he is said to have grown a *Tulsi* plant, dear to Vishnu, on one of his own hands. In course of time as he grew older he found it difficult to go to Dwarka. Seeing this the Deity asked him not to come any more and promised him that He himself would come to Dakore for his sake. Because of this Bodana took the Image one night and left for his place. The next morning the priests, finding the Image missing and suspecting that Bodana must have taken it with him, pursued him with a number of guards. Since Bodana had a good start he was overtaken by his pursuers when he had almost reached Dakore. Bodana then hid the Image in a tank near by. Enraged at this the guards killed him. The priests then failing to find the Image, became

so despondent that they started a fast unto death. The Image then appeared to the wife of Bodana in a dream and told her to satisfy the priests with gold equal to the Image in weight. The poor woman was extremely miserable at this, not knowing where to find so much gold. She had faith, however, in the promise made by the Image, and she approached the priests with the proposal. The latter accepted it, probably under the impression that, as it was impossible for her to do what she promised, they were sure to get back the Image. The woman was told in her dream where the Image was, and now that these conditions were laid down, it was taken out from the tank. They all made ready to weigh the Image with many misgivings on the part of the woman, but when the actual weight was taken, it was found no more than that of a small nose-ring of the widow to the great surprise and wonder of all present. It was a miracle and the priests had to leave without the Image. Whatever be the truth behind this legend, it is not unlikely that the Image came from Dwarka. Various dates, with five centuries between the two extremes, are assigned to this event, making it extremely difficult to decide when the shrine came into existence. The present temple in Dakore was built by one Gopala Jadunatha Tambekar, an inhabitant of Satara and a banker of the Peshwas in the year 1772 A. D.

## CHAPTE II

### Narasimha Mehta

Vaishnavism had a real start in Gujarata in the fifteenth century. This was the period when all over India many Bhaktas and Saints arose preaching the Bhakti-Marga and making it a national faith. This subject has been ably dealt with by the late Justice Mahadeva Govinda Ranade, himself an able protagonist of the Bhagavata-Dharma, in his book *The Rise of the Maharatta Power*. It is true this book deals with Maharashtra only, but what he says therein regarding the large spread of the Bhagavata Dharma in Deccan is true of almost all the provinces of India. A new wave, even a flood of Bhakti, had come upon the entire land, and leaders of religious thought and life arose simultaneously everywhere.

The person who represented this deep religious movement at its highest in Gujarata was Narasimha Mehta. He is the Bhakta-Saint of Gujarata, the greatest Vaishnava of the province. Though not widely known out of Gujarata, he is as great as any in the galaxy of saints that appeared all over the land in the medieval period. He is the prophet *par excellence* in Gujarata of the New Dispensation vouchsafed to India in the shape of the Bhagavata Dharma. He had a first-hand realization of God and he clothed his spiritual experiences in the garb of poetry of much beauty and power. The most noteworthy thing about him, however, is that his own life was a great poem written by God Him-



self. The numerous events and incidents of his life wherein God is said to have come to the help of His devotee and servant, are a Gospel of God's grace in themselves. For the first time in the history of the province God is believed and represented to have intervened in human affairs, setting His seal thereby on the true devotion of His *Bhakta* and on the unique message given through him.

Narasimha Mehta's dates of birth, marriage etc. are not certain. He was undoubtedly prior to both Vallabhacharya and Sri Chaitanya, though of late some doubts are expressed in regard to this matter. He is said to have been born in about Samvata 1470 (1414 A. D.). A few scholars and writers, Mr. K. M. Munshi being the chief among them, place his life between 1500 and 1580 A. D., which makes a difference of nearly a century. Mr. Munshi says that "about the beginning of the seventeenth century his fame as a *Bhakta* spread over all the provinces of India." This fact alone, apart from other things, would lead one to decide in favour of the former date. Narasimha Mehta is looked upon as a herald, *Vadhaiah*, of the Vallabha Sampradaya by its followers, which also confirms the earlier date.

Narasimha Mehta was born in Talaja, a village near Junagarh in Kathiawad. He belonged to the community of *Nagirs*, which proved to be a real handicap to him from the start of his life. These are, perhaps, the most intellectual people of all in the province. They are, besides, the most politically-minded people in Gujarata. In all this they resemble much the Chitpavana Brahmins of the Deccan. They claim to be the highest amongst the Brahmins, while disdaining at the same time to do any priestly work, and they have never thought it incumbent on them to take the vow of poverty, which is an integral part of a Brahmin's lot. Their sole profession has been that of politics and civil service, and they have been at the helm of affairs in many States for centuries. This has bred in them a mentality which is full of pride and superciliousness towards

other castes. In full conformity with their privileged position, both in matters of intellectual and civil life, they have been enthusiastic protagonists of the Varnashrama Dharma, the socio-religious hierarchy of the Hindus, in which they hold the top-most place. Religiously they are mostly Shaivites, and if any school of thought makes special appeal to them, it is that of Shankara.

While Narasimha Mehta was by birth a member of this community, there could be no greater contrast than that between him and the majority of his caste people. Evidently God had a special purpose in this, for He wanted to make the impossible possible. He thought it proper for His devotee and servant to go through a number of persecutions for almost the entire period of his life so that he might be tested fully and be perfected as a Saint. It seems the family of Narasimha Mehta followed the cult of Krishna if names have any meaning and if those of his father (Krishna-damodara) and grand-father (Vishnudasa) be correctly given. The latter was a servant in one of the States, but the family does not seem to have been doing well, for after his death his son Krishnadas is said to have been without employment and reduced to poverty. He died leaving Narasimha a child under the care of one of his brothers. After a few years Narasimha was betrothed to a girl belonging to a good family, but since he showed his religious tendencies early in life with a strong aversion towards the world, this engagement was cancelled. A little later he was again betrothed to a girl called Manek of a poor Nagir family. He married her when he was about eighteen years old. Soon after his uncle died leaving the family in greater straits than before. Narasimha, though married now, had no mind to work for his bread, with the result that both he and Manek had much to suffer at the hands of his brother or cousin\* and his wife with whom they lived. The sister-in-law especially made things hot for him with her

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\* It is not certain whether he was his brother or cousin. In the Hindu joint-family even cousins live together sometimes.

biting sarcasm, under the lash of which he left home suddenly at a blessed moment.

Narasimha went to Gopanatha, a temple of Shiva and practised there such severe penance that the god was much pleased with him. The boon granted to him, however, was different from what one might conceive. Mahadeva took him in spirit to Dwarka where he was made to see the eternal *Rasa-Lila*, Krishna's sport with the Gopis. There is no doubt that Narasimha Mehta had a marvellous vision at this time in his life since he himself has testified to it again and again. It was this which gave an entirely new turn to his life. He says in one of his poems :

Blessed are you, my brother's wife !  
With harsh words me you taunted,  
With the happy result that I saw  
The dance of the Lord of the Gopas in Gokula,  
And the Lord Himself embraced me.

This vision took a complete and permanent hold of the mind and the spirit of Narasimha Mehta. It became the light of all his seeing and he made up his mind to devote his life to the singing of the glory and beauty of this *Lila* in poetry so that the world might know of it. His heart being filled with joy and inspiration, he became an apostle of song of the New Dispensation. The vision he had seen burst forth into poetry and song of much beauty and strength, and what he wrote thus forms some of the earliest and the best poetry of the province. It is a gospel in itself of God's grace and mercy and love, and has held the heart of the people of Gujarata ever since.

Much of Narasimha Mehta's poetry consists of songs describing the *Lila* of Krishna in his younger days—his childhood, boyhood, and his amours with the Gopis and above all with Radha. Evidently the poet had received much inspiration from the Bhagavata Purana and the great poet Jayadeva, the author of the celebrated *Gita-*

*Govinda*. He seems to have thought of himself as one called by God Himself to do a work for his province similar to that of Jayadeva in Samskrit at the other end of India. In one of his poems, *Suratasamgrama*, the Battle of Love, which is spoken of as "an independent creation, both in conception and execution" and as "a work of higher literary value than many other Akhyanas", by Mr. Munshi, the poet speaks of himself as an ambassador of the Gopis and Radha, and of Jayadeva as that of Krishna and his companions. This shows how he felt himself related to Jayadeva.

A good part of Narasimha Mehta's poetry relating to Krishna deals with the latter's love for Radha and Radha's love for Him. To the poet this love is the highest of religious experience. It is frankly amorous and borders on the sensual, and the puritans might be shocked at some of the things he has said. Narasimha Mehta was, however, a saint and none has a right to throw stones at him for this. One should rather try to enter into the meaning of such a religious experience than to pass judgement on it. It is known as *Sringara-rasa* Bhakti, the characteristic quality of the Gopis as described in the Bhagavata. According to this Scripture of Bhakti-Marga, it is the highest kind of devotion, which it is the object of that book to preach and propagate. The idea behind it is that our love for God should be wholly disinterested or selfless, deep, passionate and free from bondage of any kind. This is love as it is in its ideal form. God has such love for His devotees, and they in their turn should give Him a similar love. The highest heaven is that in which there is mutual play of such ideal love between God and His devotees. Love of this kind is realized, to a limited extent though it be, in what we know as romantic love between man and woman. It needs to be said, however, that this latter is an extremely imperfect form of the ideal love and is only a symbol thereof. It is because of its spontaneity, disinterestedness and extraordinary power, that Bhakti at its highest is likened unto it. Bhakti is sometimes compared even to illicit love, especially as such love is free from any bondage whatsoever,



subsisting entirely by itself. This form of Bhakti is known as *Parakiya Bhakti* and is found largely in Bengal, where it has given rise to much immorality.

As for the *Sakhi-Bhava*, the relationship of romantic love between Radha and Krishna, it appeared for the first time later than the Bhagavata. Radha finds mention, not in this Purana but in the Brahma-Vaivarta, and among the Vaishnava Acharyas, Nimbarka was the first to preach the *Sakhi-Bhava* associated with Radha. It is doubtful, however, if Narasimha Mehta took it from this source. The ideal of such love and Bhakti was in the air at the time of the latter, and he assimilated it not only entirely but realized it perhaps to a larger extent than it had been before. He made it his own so completely that it assumed in him an almost independent and original form. Of all the great devotees whose number runs into some scores, he and Chaitanya are the only two in whom such realization is seen in a most intense form. The remarkable thing about this is that in both of them this type of Bhakti was an independent growth, there being no borrowing from Narasimha Mehta, who was decidedly the earlier of the two. This is a striking testimony to the reality and vitality of the ideal. God is the Bridegroom or rather the Lover and the Bhakta thinks of himself as the Beloved. This form of Bhakti corresponds to the ideal love in Sufism with this difference that in the latter the devotee is the lover and God the Beloved. Both these viz., the Vaishnavism in which Radha is the ideal of the devotee and Sufism, thus stand for the highest ideal of love and devotion for God on the part of man, and in both cases it has given birth to a unique kind of fellowship with God.

Such love for God is called *Sringara* as we have already seen. In the phraseology of the Chaitanya Sampradaya, it is known as *Madhurya*, meaning sweetness and perfect sweetness at that. In the tenth book of the Bhagavata it is called *Rasa*. As regards the meaning of this, the following from the pen of a



Roman Catholic writer, The Rev. Fr. P. Johannes, S. J., in his book on Vallabha, is worth quoting:

“It is in the tenth chapter of the *Bhagavata Purana* that the *Rasa* experience of the milk-maids is set forth. To our great astonishment, however, we find out that the *Rasa* proper to this highest experience is described in terms of *Kama* or sexual love. But we must not forget the following points:

1 “This *Kama* or lust is *alaukika*, supernatural. It has nothing to do with love born of the material *gunas*. You may call it lust, but then you must remember that it is the lust of the spirit lusting after the Spirit. Besides, the term *Kama* or lust is not adequate. For worldly lust is set forth as the *abhasa*, a mere material reflection or shadow of a divine joy. What is meant, therefore, is love in its divine transfiguration, the divine reality of which love is but a dim shadow.

2 “Hence the love-play of Krishna with the Gopis is symbolical. It is we, who look at it with *Prakrit* (natural) eyes and mind, who find in it lowly features, and it is only when the highest grace of God (Kripa) works in our souls and fills us with divine light and divine warmth that we wake up to the divine meaning of this apparently amorous conduct of the Gopis and Krishna.

3 “Moreover, the *Kama* of the Gopis included the highest appreciation of God. They gave up everything for His sake. Their love was a total surrender which human love may somehow illustrate, but does not fully represent. There was no touch of selfishness in their love. They loved Krishna only for his own sake and loved themselves only in Krishna.”

This is said with reference to the ideal of Bhakti as it was with Vallabha, but it applies still more to that of both Narasimha Mehta and Chaitanya. With these such love for God had assumed

the form of an absolute religion and their entire being was possessed by it. They were *Bhaktas par excellence* and even the teaching of religion to others was secondary in their ideal of life. They became teachers rather by force of circumstances or only incidentally.

It is interesting to note that there is a close parallel to such conjugal or even amorous love in some forms of devotion practised by a number of Christian Mystics. The beginning of such devotion goes further back than Christianity and is found in the book, *The Song of Songs*, in the Old Testament. This poem, or rather collection of poems, is attributed to King Solomon, but it seems to have been written in the 4th. century B. C.. The idea, besides, that the Israel, i. e. the Jewish people are collectively a Bride of God is found in some of the Prophets also. Jesus Christ himself taught a parable in which he compared the souls seeking God and His Kingdom to virgins looking for their Bridegroom. The same idea is found more strikingly in the teaching of St. Paul with reference to the relationship of the Church to Christ.

This idea is, again, taken up by some of the early and late Christian Fathers and medieval mystics. One of the most notable of these last is St. Bernard, one of the greatest saints of the Christian Church. He was a man of action, a leader of men and the founder and organizer of one of the most remarkable orders in the Christian Church. He was, moreover, the person who had much to do with the organization of the Second Crusade. All this is said with a view to show that he was not one to surrender himself easily to emotionalism or sentimentalism of any kind. It is all the more remarkable, therefore, that he was possessed by this type of mystic devotion. He went for the source of it to the Song of Solomon and wrote no less than eighty-six sermons on the first two chapters of the book. Some of his thoughts on this subject were brought together by him in a book, bearing the title

*A Fragment of a Fragment.* This is said to be his last work, which shows that this ideal held sway over his mind even in his last days. We may well quote here some passages from it to illustrate the type of Bhakti realized by him. Here is one of them:

“ The love of God and of the soul can be expressed in no way so perfectly as by the mutual love of Bride and Bridegroom, all being in common between them, and neither having any separate possessions. For his wife, the man must leave father and mother, for he and she are one flesh: and the woman must forget her people and her father's house, that her husband may delight in her beauty. Since the relation is the ideal one of love, it is well that the name of Bride should be given to the soul that loves.”

Then again this:

“ What can be more delightful than this conformity, what more desirable than this love, which, not content with the instructions which she receives from men, boldly approaches the Word ( Christ ) in her own person, attaches herself firmly to Him, interrogates and consults Him familiarly about all things, the capacity of her understanding being the only measure of the hardihood of her desires ? This is a true marriage-contract; nay, more, it is a real embrace; for the complete conjunction of their wills makes one spirit of them. Nor need it be apprehended that the inequality of persons can render their union defective. Love knows nothing about respectful fear. Love consists in loving, not honouring. Astonishment, fear, wonder, are good for those to whom they are seasonable. The lover knows nothing of them. Love is full of itself. When love is born in the soul, it absorbs all other passions. She that loves, loves and ignores everything; and He who deserves to be honoured, feared and admired, loves still better to be loved. Behold here a husband and a wife ! For what is the essential of wedlock but to love and be loved ? ”

Then again this:

“Fear as Lord, honour as Father, love as Husband. But of these three which is best? Surely, it is Love. Lacking love, fear is painful, honour without reward. Fear is servile if unenfranchised by love, and honour which does not spring from love is flattery. Honour and fear are indeed God’s due, but He will accept neither the one nor the other unless they are seasoned with the honey of love. Whereas love is all-sufficient by itself. Love is its own merit and its own recompense. It seeks no reason nor gain out of itself. I love because I love, I love for the sake of loving. Love is a great thing, when, making its source its object, it renews there its streams in ever-increasing bounty. Of all the movements of the soul, love is the only one which gives her Creator like for like.”

This again:

“Love, as I have said, is a great thing; but it has degrees. That of the Spouse is the highest. Children love, but they think of the inheritance, and fearing to lose it, they feel more respect than love. The whole good and only hope of the Spouse is love; and if she loves abundantly, her Lover is content. She can give Him nothing more. The singleness of love is peculiar to marriage, and is found in no other relationship. He is Love, she is the Spouse of Love, and she is the only one who loves for love’s sake only.....It is therefore that I said that to love thus is to contract marriage with God; for it is impossible to love thus and to be little loved in return. Verily she is prevented and surpassed in love. Happy she who has deserved to be prevented with the benediction of so great a sweetness. Happy she who enjoys those chaste and sacred embraces of a love holy and pure, delightful and pleasant, calm and sincere, mutual, intimate and violent, which joins two persons in one; for “They who loved God are one Spirit with Him.”

These are the considered words of one of the greatest Christians that ever lived. He was, moreover, one in whom there

was nothing abnormal or morbid. He was, on the other hand, a fully integrated personality, thought, feeling and action in their highest forms being fused together in him in a complete harmony such as is found among few disciples of Christ. It is because of this that he has left an abiding influence on the whole of the Christian world for several centuries. That such a man should have thought of the conjugal form of Bhakti as the highest, the crown of life and devotion, is a point worth noting.

Other Christian Mystics have thought of Bhakti in the same way. One of these is Ruysbroek, a Fleming by birth, who lived from 1293 to 1381 A. D. He passed almost his entire life in contemplative quietude, and wrote among other things a book called *Spiritual Nuptials*. Herein he writes of the highest relationship between soul and God as that between a bride and a bridegroom.

Among the moderns a great love-mystic was Coventry Patmore, an English poet who lived in the last century. By birth a Protestant, he found Protestantism too shallow for his deep religious feeling and joined the Catholic Church. His religious poetry, nevertheless, makes an equal appeal to both Protestants and Catholics. In the course of his spiritual progress, he came to be powerfully attracted to the Song of Songs and the writings of St. Bernard. The two books of the latter, *The Love of God* and *A Fragment of a Fragment* were translated into English by him and his wife. He was so possessed with this ideal of the conjugal relationship between God and the human soul that he was sure it would one day be as common as the filial relationship which now prevails among the Christians. He said: "Under the first dispensation, men were the servants of God: under the second His sons; what if under a third 'the voice of the Bride and the Bridegroom be heard again in our streets' ?" He says that "every man's soul is as a woman before God."



In regard to this mystic poet of England, E. Herman, in his book *The Meaning and Value of Mysticism* writes as follows:

"Now Coventry Patmore recalls us, in more convincing accents than any other modern mystic, to the fact that behind the unhealthiness and the oftentimes painful immodesty which disfigure so much of erotic mysticism, there lies the simple truth that love between man and woman is the sacrament of that great mystery which is "the burning heart" and "celestial decorum" of the universe. He insists with compelling power that not earthly but heavenly marriage is the original. In applying the language of earthly love to the soul's communion with God, we are not dealing in an alien and questionable terminology, but speaking in the very mother tongue of the Spirit: it is when we apply it to *human* marriage that we translate. No abuse, therefore, nor any lurking danger need deter us from speaking of God and the soul in terms which were coined in Heaven to fit that supreme relationship before ever they were borrowed on earth to glorify its human symbol."

Herman says the following with regard to some of the poems of Patmore:

"He has treated of this aspect of mystic marriage between Divinity and Humanity with matchless power in his odes *The Unknown Eros*, *Eros and Psyche*, *De Natura Decorum*, *Sponsa Dei*. For sheer splendour of spiritual passion and austerity they stand unrivalled in literature, combining sensuous beauty and flaming ardour with a certain deep and impassable discretion. In a book, *Sponsa Dei*, which he burnt, feeling the world was not ready for it, he gave full expression to this aspect of his thought. Mr. Edmund Gosse, who saw the volume in manuscript, describes it as "a transcendental treatise in Divine desire seen through the veil of human desire."

All this makes it easy for us to understand and appreciate the Love-Mysticism, the *Sringara Bhakti* of Narasimha Mehta,

Chaitanya, Mirabai and many others in India. With the three persons mentioned here, it had become a New Dispensation in itself and they allowed themselves to be swayed by it completely. Narasimha Mehta had a vision in early life of Sri Krishna and the Gopis with Radha as the chief among them interchanging such disinterested, passionate and perfect love between themselves, and to him it stood for the highest communion and fellowship between God and human soul. He describes again and again this love of the Gopis in its various forms and shades, and his spirit is so purified that nothing is impure in his eyes. He is also not afraid to repeat himself often in these poems of his. He describes the Gopis as coming to Krishna dressed in their finest clothes and trying their best to attract his love. Succeeding in this they all dance together to the accompaniment of various kinds of musical instruments. It is given to Narasimha to witness this dance with a torch in his hand, and he becomes so engrossed and absorbed in the divine dance that he forgets himself and loses his manhood, for he too has assimilated himself to the character of the Gopis. His soul has become feminine with God alone as the eternal man. He says:

Blessed, blessed indeed is the beauty of Vrandavana.  
 And blessed, indeed ! is the autumnal month of Ashvina:  
 Blessed, blessed indeed is this sport of Krishna,  
 And blessed is this dance of the Gopis.  
 Blessed are these Gopis, and blessed is this sport of God,  
 Blessed is this dance in which God is engaged.  
 It is by the grace of the Lord of the Gopis  
 That Narasimha accompanies this dance with music.

He says again and again that seeing this dance his manhood has vanished, and that he has become a female-companion of the Gopis so that he may have the privilege to sing with them. So conscious is he of the unique privilege conferred on him that he does not hesitate to say:

The joy of this dance is known to Shiva and Shuka,  
It is known to the Gopis of Vraja and to Narasimha.

It was in all probability soon after he had this experience or rather vision that he assimilated himself to the character of the Gopis and for all the purposes of his religious life, became one. He sang then of his own love-life with Krishna, and all the things that have been described about the Gopis in the Bhagavata and by poets like Jayadeva, he tried to realize or rather actually did so in his own life. He says:

I have married, I have married Krishna, my Bridegroom,  
and I know none else.

I shall proclaim this from the house-top, And now I shall  
know no fear.

And again:

I will not let Thee go out of my sight, oh, the Life of  
my life !

I will hold Thee close to my heart, my dark-coloured Beloved !

So true and deep is his love for Krishna that he even suffers from pangs of jealousy lest his Beloved Lord might leave him for others. He has the temerity to accuse Him of faithlessness, whereupon they both have a quarrel, which is followed by reconciliation. In the morning Krishna goes away on his usual round of grazing the cows, which creates much anguish of separation in his heart. Experiences like these are repeatedly sung by him in some hundreds of songs called *Padas*, and they are collected together in his *Sringara Mala*, the Rosary of Love. It seems Narasimha lived the life of a Gopi for a period extending over many years.

Narasimha Mehta also wrote several poems dealing with various phases of the life of the Divine Child and Boy-Krishna. These are *Vasantana Pado*, The Songs of Spring, *Hindolana Pado*, The Songs of the Spring Festival, *Krishnajanma*, The Birth of Krishna, *Bala Lila*, The Sports of the Divine Child, *Nagadaman*, The destruction of the demon in the form of a Snake, *Danalila*, The taking of the toll from the Gopis, and *Govindagamana*, The Departure of Krishna from Gokula to Mathura. These poems are based on the story of Krishna's life as given in the tenth book of the Bhagavata, and the poet is mostly objective in his description of these events in Krishna's life. Mr. K. M. Munshi, the well-known Gujarati litterateur, appraises the literary value of these poems as follows: "They are not literal translations of the originals, nor are they, in presentation and substance, independent works representing Gujarati life. The author knows the text well. The original episode is changed; unified by the poet's imagination, it is reproduced as a fresh story, though not different from the Puranic original in incident and character."

There is one original poem written during this period: viz, *Suratasangrama*, the Battle of Love. In it the poet describes an imaginary battle between Krishna and his company of boy-friends on one side, and Radha and her Gopi-friends on the other. The poet shows the Gopis under their leader Radha in revolt against the unlawful exactions in the shape of the toll of curds imposed on them by Krishna and his friends and as challenging them either to surrender or to fight with them. They send an ambassador, who is no other than our poet, to Krishna with this message. Krishna refuses to surrender and accepts the challenge to fight. He sends his own messenger for this purpose, this being Jayadeva, the author of the Gita-Govinda. Then follows a great battle in which the Gopis show themselves under the capable leadership of Radha more than a match for Krishna and his party, with the result that the latter are defeated. In this fight all the sympathy of the poet lies with the Gopis, and he delights with all his heart in the defeat

of Him who is his Lord and the Lord of all. He is eager to proclaim this victory of the Gopis to the whole world. He is no longer here a Gopi but a Gopis' champion. This is perhaps a change that has come over him from the earlier stage of his life in which he delighted in being a Gopi.

There is another poem, *Sudama Charitra*, which, in all probability, represents the change that had come over the poet in his middle age. In this he describes the story of Sudama, a fellow-student and friend of Krishna. Both of them were studying together in their early days when they became friends. Later on Krishna, who was known at school as a son of an ordinary man, became a great person and came to be worshipped as an Incarnation of God, while Sudama remained a poor Brahmin who found it difficult even to maintain himself and his family. Hearing the great fame of his friend, and goaded by his wife who had to bear the brunt of the hardships due to their poverty and even penury, Sudama went to Krishna for help with much fear and trembling in his heart. He was in doubt whether he would be even allowed to have an audience with one who was now so great. He wondered, besides, if in case Krishna saw him, he would remember him after the lapse of so many years. Somehow or other he managed to see Krishna, who not only recognised him instantly, but leaving all his greatness aside treated him just as a brother and friend. He gave him a royal reception and kept him with him for some time. He then sent him home to his wife and children loaded with rich gifts. The poem describes all these events with deep feeling and much pathos, and there is in it a fine representation of the humanity of Krishna. This is perhaps the only poem of the poet in which he deals with Krishna of the latter days, and he depicts him as one whose chief characteristic is love, spontaneous and unconventional love of his younger days, and not the power and wisdom of the Krishna of the Mahabharata. The poet, besides, was conscious in all probability of the fact that he too was a Sudama of his times, and that he was befriended by



Krishna in the same way. One wonders if the poet has not written an auto-biography of his own while reciting the story of Sudama, and if he has not changed his relationship with Krishna from that of a *Sakhi*, a Gopi, to that of a *Sakha*, a man-friend.

Whatever this be, in another poem of his, Narasimha Mehta goes a step further and gives us a history of an event that took place in his own life. This relates to the providential help he got from God at the time of his son's marriage, the poem itself being called *The Marriage of Samaladas*. What was done to Sudama in times past is done again to the poet in a mysterious and miraculous manner, and he must needs sing of it so that the people may know the abounding grace and mercy of God and His ever-present help to His devotees. The poet had no secular profession though he had a wife and two children, which made things pretty hard for them all. His wife, *Manekbai*, seems to have been well reconciled to the life of poverty which the family was constrained to lead, for there is not a word of complaint uttered by the poet against her in all his writings. The children grew up and Koonverbai, his eldest child, came to be married in course of time. The poet-saint must have seen the hand of God in this matter also as he could not but do with his profound faith in God, but we do not know if he gave expression to it in any poem of his. It is interesting to observe that the next great poet of Gujarata after Narasimha Mehta, Kavi Premananda, who lived some two centuries later, wrote a poem in which he describes how God came to the help of Narasimha Mehta at the time of the marriage of a child of Koonverbai. As for the marriage of his son, it was in all probability a more difficult matter, especially in view of the paucity of girls in his community, and the hand of God was visible from the start. A man came to Junagarh, the town in which the poet had settled down, to find a suitable match for the daughter of a rich and influential man of his caste belonging to Vadanagar. Somehow or other, the son of the poet, Samaladas, found favour in his eyes and the betrothal was arranged to the evident surprise.

and chagrin of most of the Nagirs. The difficulties of the poet-saint began now, for he had to provide clothes, ornaments etc, for the bride and to take the marriage-party to the house of the bride's parents. All this required money and the saint did not know what to do. His wife then asked him to go to Dwarka to seek the help of his Lord Krishna as was done by Sudama in the past. Accordingly the saint went there and found the requisite help. The marriage was then performed with much eclat to the great surprise of all. Evidently a miracle was performed, or at any rate the poet-saint believed so, and with him millions have believed in it since his time. Narasimha Mehta was conscious of the visible presence of Krishna with him until the whole affair was finished. Hitherto this miracle is more universally believed in than any other of medieval or modern times in the province of Gujarata, and it has helped much in establishing the reputation of Narasimha Mehta as a chosen saint of God. It has given him a permanent place in the heart of the people as a Bhakta of God. It has undoubtedly deepened and enriched the faith of the people of Gujarata in God and in His unfailing Providence.

Other miracles are said to have been performed by God to save His servant from difficult situations, the most important of these being the one in which Krishna provided him with a garland of flowers. This was done to save the saint from severe persecution and torture at the hands of the Prince of Junagarh, who imprisoned him in order to witness a miracle in his favour performed by God. This event is celebrated in a number of small poems collected together under the name *Haramala*, which means, The String of Garlands. This poem is attributed to the poet himself, but serious doubts have been raised of late as regards his authorship of the poem. Evidently the fame of the saint had spread far and wide and many forgeries were committed in his name.

Narasimha Mehta's experience of God mellowed with age, and both his thought and feeling grew richer in course of time.

The Love-Mysticism, which had taken so powerful a hold on him in his earlier days, became gradually transformed into one in which he saw God everywhere. It became almost pantheistic in the highest and the best sense of the term. He was a complex personality. Besides being a great devotee and a poet, he was possessed by the reflective spirit of a philosopher, which became prominent in him in the last stage of his life. Like the Rishis of the Upanishads, he saw the entire universe transfigured by the Spirit of God, and he saw God flaming in and through and over all the universe. He had such a vision, which he describes with all the beauty of thought and language at his command. Here is a poem, for example, describing one of his visions:

What dost thou see in the sky, pervading it all ?  
 At the feet of the same Dark One, I desire to die,  
 For, there is none here who can be compared to Krishna.  
 My Lord's beauty is matchless and is such  
 As can not be apprehended by my intellect:  
 Seeing Him I can only lose myself in an endless festive season.  
 Holding fast with the bonds of love to the roots of eternal life,  
 We should know the entire cosmos,  
 With all its bodies and spirits as but one Spirit.  
 Where millions of rising suns shine  
 With all their flaming, glorious light,  
 Where the sky is ablaze with bright colour  
 As with a mantle of gold.

Sachchidananda is sporting in joy,  
 Swinging in a cradle of gold.  
 There is neither wick, nor oil, nor thread,  
 And yet burns bright everlastingly  
 The flaming light without any change.  
 He is to be seen without eyes,  
 To be apprehended though without form.  
 He is the Divine Drink to be tasted without tongue.

Unknowable and Eternal, He can not be understood by reason,  
And yet He swings high and low,  
And pervades all things:  
He is the Lord of Narasimha:  
Only Saints can hold Him in the web of their love.

Another song, equally beautiful and great, though of a different style, is this:

In all this Cosmos, Thou art but one,  
Manifesting Thyself in diverse infinite forms.  
Thou art the Spirit in bodies,  
And the Light of light Thou art.  
Uttering Thy word in voiceless deep,  
Thou manifestest Thyself in the Vedas;  
Thou art the Wind, Thou art the Water,  
Thou art the Earth and the Holder of the same.  
Thou hast blown Thyself in the form of trees.  
All this manifold universe Thou hast created  
Out of Thyself to enjoy the same in various ways;  
Thou hast manifested Thyself as souls for the same purpose.  
This is the witness of Scriptures all,  
Of the Vedas and of the Smritis;  
Diverse in forms, Thou art the one and the same,  
As things made of gold are one with gold.  
Thou hast moulded all things out of Thyself,  
And given them different names and forms;  
They are all, nonetheless, the same as Thyself.

A vision such as this which sees God as the All inspires the poet-saint to preach a gospel which is ethically deep and profound. This is done in a song which has attained in our days world-wide publicity through Mahatma Gandhi who has made it the rule of his life. Here is a free and rough English translation of it:

A true Vaishnava is he,  
 Who feels others' sufferings as his own.  
 He serves others in their sorrows,  
 And has no pride in himself.  
 He is humble before every one,  
 And speaks ill of none.  
 He is steadfast in thought, word and deed.  
 Blessed is the mother who has given birth to such a one.  
 He looks upon all with equal love  
 And is without desire.  
 Upon every woman but his wife,  
 As his own mother he looks.  
 He never tells an untruth with his tongue,  
 Nor covets what belongs to another.  
 He is never tempted by any evil;  
 His spirit is free from the bonds of all attachment.  
 He is wholly devoted to the name of God,  
 And all the holy places are in his body.  
 Without covetousness and free from guile,  
 He is free from lust and anger.  
 Even the very sight of such a person  
 Is enough to save one's seventy-one generations.  
 So says Narasimha.

God had set the seal of saintliness on the life of this great soul by granting him a most remarkable devotion, by manifesting Himself to him in a number of visions, and by giving him a deep ethical insight. Narasimha was, indeed, a great mystic with a complex personality, and had known and seen God again and again. The key to his life lay in his *Bhakti*. Both work and knowledge held an entirely subordinate place to this in his life and thought. These have an importance of their own only so long as *Bhakti* has not awakened in one. He says:



"The duties and obligations of ordinary religious life have passed away from me. I have known the secret of life and am now free from delusion. If one worships Sachchidananda, who is the same as Radha and Krishna, true religion is close to him. Man is bound to perform ritual acts only so long as he has not known the true meaning of *Bhakti*. The truest means of attaining the Final Beatitude is the Name of Hari, and those who take refuge in the Name are perfect Saints."

Narasimha Mehta's poems are full of such teaching, but the remarkable thing is that he did not merely put it on paper but practised it in his life. His life was a great poem, greater than anything he ever wrote. He preached a gospel which was new to some extent for the people of Gujarata, but his practice was still more so. Because of this he broke many conventions which violated the true spirit of the Bhagavata Dharma, with the inevitable result that the people who thought themselves to be the custodians of the old order were up against him. This was the more so since he belonged to a community which believed itself to be at the top of the Hindu socio-religious hierarchy. His life of faith and devotion and voluntary poverty was a real eyesore to the Nagirs, who did all they could by way of ridicule and active persecution to quench his faith. Narasimha Mehta, however, was more than a match for them, for he knew that God was with him, and he met this persecution with a remarkable forbearance that was born of strength in God. The height of his offence against social propriety and religious convention was reached when he, without any hesitation, began to associate for the purpose of spiritual fellowship, with people belonging to lower and even untouchable communities. This gave rise to a hue and cry which must have been pretty hard to bear even for him. To all this he gave an answer which has not many parallels in the history of religion. This is what he says:

We are such, even such as you call us.

I am the only one who is evil in society.

Yea, I am worse than the worst.  
 You are welcome to abuse me any way you like.  
 My love, however, has entered deep into my heart.  
 I am a man of evil deeds as you say.  
 But the Vaishnavas are indeed dear to me.  
 He who will distinguish between Harijans,\*  
 As of lower and higher castes,  
 Will not be free from the round of birth and death.

Even a striking miracle is reported to have been performed by God to justify Narasimha Mehta in this conduct of his in so far as it relates to his having gone to the place of the untouchables for the purpose of having religious fellowship with them. The story is that when the Nagirs demurred at the presence of the devotee at a dinner-party of his caste-people, God placed an untouchable between every two men, with the result that they were deeply ashamed of their behaviour towards this saint of God. Whatever be the truth behind this story, there is no doubt that with his holy life, his extraordinary devotion to God, his inspired poetry, and his great sacrifices and sufferings, he had raised the social conscience and the religious sense of the people amongst whom he lived to such an extent that they were constrained, probably in his life-time, to acclaim him as a chosen saint of God. Legends have gathered round his name, and several poets have sung of some of the episodes of his life. Perhaps it is no exaggeration to say that no other man has held the heart of the people of Gujarata to the extent that he has since his time. He is the man of God *par excellence*, the *Bhakta*, the Mystic of Gujarata. He is the noblest type of saintliness, known to this province, of the unsectarian Bhagavata Dharma. He is the greatest Love-Mystic that Gujarata has produced so far, and the most remarkable thing about him is that his Mysticism, deep and thorough-going as it is, has never been

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\* This word *Harijan* means a man of God and is used here and in all Vaishnava literature in that sense.

abused to the slightest extent. His songs, known as *Prabhatians*, morning devotional lyrics, in which he has sung the *lila* of Krishna in connection with His pastoral work, are some of the sweetest songs in the Gujarati language, and they have become universal property, sung alike by the rich and the poor, the literate and the illiterate, men and women. These alone are enough to make him immortal among the people of Gujarata. Uniting itself with the early dawn and the morning light, his spirit has become one with Nature at its best and pervaded the life of the Province.

## CHAPTER III

### Mirabai

Another saint whom the people of Gujarata have made their own, almost if not altogether, as much as Narasimha Mehta, is Mirabai. Gujarata can claim her as its own, for she is said to have passed some years of her life in Dwarka. She is, besides, more of a national, an all-India figure than Narasimha Mehta, for all her *Bhajans*, devotional songs, are in Hindi, which makes it possible for them to be sung far and wide from one end of India to the other, excepting perhaps the South India proper. In addition to this, it is perhaps no exaggeration to say that she is the greatest woman *Bhakta* and Mystic of India.

She was born in a royal family of Mewada, her father being Rathoda Ravisimha, the Prince of Medta. She is believed to have been born in about 1500 A. D. Her family was in all likelihood Vaishnava in faith, and her grandfather is said to have influenced her in her childhood in giving her a deeply religious turn of mind. She was married to Bhojaraja, a son of Rana Sanga, the Prince of Chitoda. The royal house of this place is considered to be the noblest among the Rajputs. It claims to belong to the solar dynasty with an unbroken descent from the Sun-God himself for at least three thousand years. It has made good this claim by sacrificing its all for the sake of preserving the purity of Hinduism

and Rajput blood. Even in the darkest days of Moslem ascendancy and aggression, it refused to humble itself to the extent of giving any of its daughters in marriage to the Imperial House of the Moguls. Rana Pratapa was the one Prince who refused to be tempted by all the blandishments of or to submit to the entire might of Akbar. He preferred to lose all his kingdom and live as an exile and a wanderer for years in circumstances of extreme poverty and misery, rather than contract a marriage tie with the family of the great Emperor. Single-handed he defied all the power of the latter, making thus his name immortal as one of the greatest patriots among the Hindus. The history of the royal family of Chitoda is full of rare heroism, which together with the fact that it was the only one among the great royal families of Rajaputana to refuse to give its daughters to the Moguls, has given it a unique place among the Rajputs. Even to-day, this family considers itself and is looked upon by the whole of India as the noblest among the Rajputs, though in point of territory and income the State of Udaipur, the home of this family, does not stand so high as some other Rajput States.

Rana Pratapa was a grand-son of Rana Sanga and a nephew of the husband of Mirabai. Rana Sanga was a heroic Prince and it was he who offered the stoutest resistance to Babar, the founder of the Mogul Empire. He was defeated by the latter in the battle of Panipat in 1526 A. D. and it is interesting to note that Mirabai's father and one of her uncles were killed in this battle. Mira's husband was the heir-apparent of Rana Sanga, but he had passed away some years before the defeat of the latter. After the death of Rana Sanga one of his younger sons, Vikramaditya, supplanted his elder brother and became the King of Chitoda.

Mirabai had already been widowed for some years before these events took place, and the change in the family's fortune together with the death of so many of her relations must have surely helped in the deepening of her religious life. She had



turned to God in all probability in her childhood, her early widowhood had given her mind and heart a definite bias towards an all-absorbing religious life, and what little may have been needed to complete the process was done by these calamities that fell upon the family one after another in such quick succession. Now her mind became wholly devoted to God, and she cared little for the ordinary proprieties of life. Her house became a resort of ascetics and devotees, and she began to mix with them freely without giving a thought to her dignity and position as a princess. She was, besides, a poetess of great gifts, and composed many songs full of deep and mystic devotion. In all probability her saintliness was a standing rebuke to the young Prince, who had an uneasy conscience on the score of his having deprived his brother of his rightful throne. He seems, besides, to have been surrounded by evil advisers, and listening to them and to the criticisms of ordinary people, who are always offended when any one turns seriously to God, he started a series of petty persecutions against Mirabai. He is said to have gone even to the length of making two attempts on her life, from both of which she is said to have been saved by miracles. Both these attempts are attributed to her husband, but evidently these are legends which grew later on. These and many other incidents are related in songs said to be composed by her. This does not seem to be true, however. Unfortunately a number of songs composed later on have been attributed to Mirabai, which makes it difficult to find out what are her own.

In many of the stories and miracles concerning Mirabai, her husband is spoken of as living and persecuting her. In these his name is given as Kumbha Rana. This is purely legendary. It is a later growth round the holy life of Mirabai arising from the popular desire to invest her life with much glory. There has been, besides, a confusion of facts resulting in the creation of an interesting but an untrue story. The late Col. Todd, the well-known author of *Rajasthana*, was probably responsible for this, being misled into believing that since Kumbha Rana was a Vaish-

nava and had built some Vaishnava temples, he must be the husband of Mirabai. In reality he lived some decades before Mirabai. He was so devoted to Krishna-worship that he wrote a commentary on the *Gita-Govinda*. It is doubtful if Mira knew of this work and if she was influenced in any way by the writings or the example of Kumbha Rana, although he belonged to the family of her husband. In all probability, the religion of the royal house of Chitoda was Shaivism, which may have been an additional ground for the persecution of Mirabai.

Like Narasimha Mehta, with whom she had much in common, the chief influence on the life and spirit of Mira was that of the *Bhagavata* and the *Gita-Govinda*. What may be called the unsectarian Bhagavata-Dharma was in the air at that time, and it was propagating itself through the lives and works of many saints and devotees. Mira came later than Narasimha Mehta and seems to have been influenced by his life, though indirectly. She is even said to have written a poem dealing with the incident of the dowry given to his daughter with the help of God. She was a contemporary of Vitthalnatha, the son of Vallabhacharya, and is said to have known some of the Vaishnavas of the Vallabha Sampradaya. She is also said to have known some of the personal disciples of Sri Chaitanya. She refused, however, to be a member of any of the new Churches that had then come into being. She was too independent a spirit for that, especially as her own experience of God was deep and profound. She probably looked upon them as innovations upon what she may have conceived to be the *Sanatana Dharma*, the Catholic Church of the Hindus. She is reported to have met the followers of both Vallabha and Chaitanya, and the accounts of these meetings that have come down show Mirabai's independence and originality of spirit. She had more in common with the founders of the two new Vaishnava Churches than with the followers thereof.

Mirabai's real greatness lies in her *Bhakti*. She is primarily a *Bhakta*, and a Poetess next. Her poetry is undoubtedly original

and has the touch of a true genius. Her imagination is rich, though it moves within a limited sphere. The various illustrations she has given while describing her love for God have become deeply embedded into the heart of the people and found an abiding place in the literature of North India. She lacks the force, the largeness of conception and the variety of Narasimha Mehta, but she makes up this deficiency by her tender passion, delicacy and sweetness. Her feminine soul has expressed itself in songs which are so exquisite that they captivate the hearts of all. Practically all of them are entirely subjective, born of tender and deep feeling, and it is in this that their great charm lies.

Like Chaitanya and Narasimha Mehta, Mira is a Love-Mystic. She conceives herself to be a bride of Krishna and loves Him with all the ardour of her heart. She is one of those few persons in the entire range of human history, in whom sublimation of the sex-element and its transmutation into sex-mysticism are seen in their noblest form. She speaks often of Krishna as *Giridhara*, The Holder of the Mount Giri, which may be due to the fact that the form of Krishna which appeals to her the most is the one in which He had manifested Himself as both the Lord and the Protector of His devotees. We shall give here a few of her songs in a rough translation:

I shall meditate on my Lord and Master:

What else have I to do now ?

O my beautiful Shyama,\* what shall I do,

What shall I do with any one else ?

Rising early every day,

And performing my ablutions,

I shall meditate

On my Lord and Master.

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\* The dark-coloured one.

The world is like an ocean  
Full of deep waters;  
But, my Beloved, I shall cross it  
With my faith in Thee.

I shall feed the saints first,  
O, my Beloved,  
And then shall feed myself,  
On the remnants of food left by them.

Thy dance is at its height,  
In Vrandavana, O my Beloved,  
And I too shall join  
In that divine dance.

Rich clothes of silk and gold  
Have no use for me now;  
Mine are now the orange-coloured clothes,\*  
And in these I shall move about openly.

The Lord of Mira  
Is He who held the Mount on His finger,  
And I shall fix my heart  
On His lotus-feet.

Here is another:

O my friend, I bought my Lord  
Without paying any price.

Some say He is light in weight,  
Some say He is heavy,  
And they ask me to weigh Him properly:  
But I got Him without a price.

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\* This is the colour that signifies renunciation.

Some say He is cheap,  
Some say He is dear.  
Some say He is invaluable,  
But I got Him without a price.

I got Him in the alleys  
Of the forest of Vrandavana,  
And I did this publicly  
Announcing it with a beat of drum.

Mira's Lord is He  
Who holds the mount on His finger;  
He has come to me  
Because He gave me a promise in my past birth.

Here is a poem showing the inner anguish of her heart:

None knows the pains I suffer from,  
And yet I am mad with pain;  
Only those who are wounded  
Know the wounds of others and none else.

As the fish panteth after water  
When it is taken out of it,  
So doth pant my heart after my Lord;  
I am mad with pain.

My bed is made on piercing arrows,  
And I must lie thereupon;  
I am mad with pain  
And none know how I suffer.

Mira's pain will only then disappear  
When her Lord will be her physician.  
I am mad with pain,  
And none knoweth how I suffer.



In the following we have another experience of hers:

Where shall I go now  
And whom shall I call aloud ?  
Deeply I am wounded:  
To whom shall I go and complain ?

My Beloved has become my hunter:  
I am the doe, His prey.  
Deeply I am wounded;  
To whom shall I go and complain ?

From far the bullet came;  
It struck my head and pierced it through:  
Deeply I am wounded;  
To whom shall I go and complain ?

The dagger of love He has driven  
Deep into my heart,  
Wounding me deeply.  
To whom shall I go and complain ?

Mira's Lord is He  
Who holdeth the mount on His finger;  
I am now dead to the world  
And am safe in His hands.

Here is another remarkable song:

O Thou player on the flute, come to my land !  
Come to my land,  
O Thou Flute-player, come to my land !  
Dark art Thou in colour and full of charm;  
Come to my land,  
O Thou Flute-player !

Thou hast said, I am coming, I am coming,  
And hast given many promises.

My tongue has been wasted by counting.  
 And so have been the lines of my fingers.  
 Come to my land,  
 O Thou Flute-player, come to my land !

I have been seeking Thee  
 In one forest and another;  
 I have wandered all over the country.  
 I shall leave everything for Thee,  
 And put on the orange-coloured robe;  
 Come to my land,  
 O Thou Flute-player, come to my land !

Neither paper nor ink have I, nor have I a pen;  
 Nor have I a bird to carry my message;  
 How can I send Thee any message ?  
 Come to my land,  
 O Thou Flute-player, come to my land !

Thou hast a peacock-crown on Thy head,  
 And an umbrella over Thy head;  
 Thy hair Thou hast well oiled;  
 O Thou Lord of Mira,  
 Come to me in this dress !  
 Come to my land,  
 O Thou Flute-player, come to my land !

There are a number of lyrics of this type, each having a peculiar character of its own. Mirabai is a true poetess and her imagination never faileth her. She never writes except when she is moved by deep emotion within her heart. Among these songs of hers, two types predominate; one in which she gives expression to her longing for and the feeling of separation from her Lord, and the other in which she describes the experience of finding Him. Sometimes we have a beautiful harmony of both the experiences in one song.

Like Narasimha Mehta Mirabai had to go through much persecution at the hands of her people. Mira's position was in all probability a little worse, since she was a woman and belonged moreover to a royal family. She has given expression to this aspect of her life in a number of songs as was done by Narasimha Mehta. Here is one of these:

Now have I Krishna as my Lord,  
And I owe allegiance to none else.  
I have left my mother and father,  
And left all my relations.

Associating with the saints of God,  
I have bidden good-bye to the comments of the world.  
For me, to see a saint is to run for him.  
And shedding tears of love in the company of such,  
I have reared the creeper of immortality.

I have found on my way both God and His saints:  
I shall bear the saints on my head,  
And my Lord in my heart.

I have now become notorious for this state of mine,  
And all people know of it.

Mira's Lord is He Who holdeth the mount on His finger.  
What was to happen, has happened.

Several stories concerning the persecution of Mirabai are afloat, and in some of them she is said to have escaped from death more than once in a miraculous manner. One of these is that the Prince of Mewar, not being able to bear that she should associate with common people and thus lower the prestige of his house, sent her a cup of poison with the word that it was holy water. Mira drank it and nothing happened to her. Another time the Prince sent her a snake in a basket supposed to contain flowers for her God, and this time too she escaped unhurt.

Whatever be the truth behind these stories, there is no doubt that Mirabai had to leave Chitoda at last. From here she went to her father's place where she found a hearty welcome from her uncle and his son Jayamala. Some time after this Chitoda seems to have gone through a very bad time. The Mohammedan Prince of Gujarata attacked and conquered it. Later on Humayuna conquered it from the Sultan of Gujarata and gave it back to Vikramaditya in 1536 A. D.. This was a time of much political upheaval, and the varying fortunes of the royal families of Rajputana and Mewar were far from helpful to Mira in her religious life. Medta, her father's place, also had to suffer much and she had to leave it for other places. She is said to have gone to Vrandavana and then to Dwarka. It is in this latter place that she is said to have passed away in 1547 A. D..

The story of her passing away or rather translation to heaven is given as follows. After she left Chitoda, the place had to undergo much misfortune. Seeing this and also the fact that her fame as a saint of God was spreading far and wide, the royal family was convinced that all its miseries were due to what it had done to Mira. A deputation was sent to her with a request to return home, but she did not see her way to comply with this request. Then several Brahmins were sent to her to press her to come back, and when she refused to go with them, they started a fast unto death. Much troubled in her heart at this, Mirabai wanted to know the will of God about the matter of her return. She went to the chief Image in Dwarka and began to sing and dance, and while singing the last line of her song again and again, praying therein God not to let her be separated from Him, she is said to have disappeared in the Image itself.

Whatever be the truth underlying this story, there is no doubt that Mirabai was a great saint as well as a true poetess. In all probability she is the greatest woman devotee of God that India or for that matter the world has known.

Mirabai was as great a person as any in her time. She lived in a period which saw such great persons as Sri Chaitanya, Vallabhacharya, Tulsidas etc. She was younger than the first two of these, and she does not seem to have known any of them personally. There is a story of her meeting Jiva Goswami, one of the chief disciples of Chaitanya, an interview in which Mira showed herself to greater advantage. It is said that when she went to Vrardavana she desired to meet Jiva Goswami. The latter, however, refused to see her on the ground that she was a woman. Mira then sent word asking him if he still felt himself to be a male, for according to her Sri Krishna was the only male in Vrardavana. Jiva Goswami at once realized his mistake and saw Mirabai.

Mirabai has been mentioned in some of the early literature of the Vallabha Sampradaya. She seems to have been pretty well-known to Vitthalnatha and his followers as a person of high religious character. The references to her, however, are not very commendatory, which is undoubtedly due to the sectarian bias of the writers of these accounts. But they show clearly that she was an entirely independent and powerful personality, and that she exerted much influence over a number of people. A disciple of Vitthalnatha remained at her place for several days, which made the Vaishnava leader anxious lest he might leave his faith and be converted to that of Mira. He then wrote a letter to the disciple asking him to leave Mira's place immediately, which he did. It seems Mira's faith was nearer to that of Sri Ramananda, the great disciple of Sri Ramanuja, than to the Vaishnavism of Vallabha or Chaitanya, in spite of her great devotion for Krishna. She is said to have been influenced by the teachings of Ravidas, one of the spiritual successors of Ramananda. In consequence of this her *Bhakti* for Krishna was tempered by her realization of the Absolute God. It was in all likelihood on account of this that the Vaishnavas of Vallabha's school of thought were afraid of her. Whatever this be, to-day Mirabai is revered as a saint of God by all, Vaishnavas and non-Vaishnavas.



## CHAPTER IV

### **Dayarama and His Vaishnava Poetry**

The movement of Bhagavata-Dharma so ably initiated into Gujarata by the two Saints and Love-mystics, Narasimha Mehta and Mirabai, was carried further by a succession of poets. The example of these two poet-saints and the Bhagavata Purana inspired these later poets to such an extent that they produced quite a crop of poetic literature. As a matter of fact the new movement had begun to flow through more than one channel even from the time of Narasimha Mehta, if not earlier. Two poets, Keshavdas Kayastha and Bhalana, who were in all probability contemporaries of Narasimha Mehta and who, for aught we know, had never even heard of him, wrote a number of poems dealing with the subject-matter of the tenth book of the Bhagavata. Bhalana is said to have lived from 1439-1539 A. D. by Diwan Bahadur Krishnalal M. Zaveri, the well-known Gujarati scholar in his *Milestones in Gujarati Literature* in English. He wrote on both religious and secular subjects. His religious belief seems to have been that of Ramanandis, but he looked upon Ram, Krishna and Shiva with equal reverence. Being an eclectic in spirit he wanted to make up his lack of depth and intensity by breadth and comprehension. He wrote a number of stories in the form of poems, the material thereof being drawn from the Puranas. Among these are some dealing with the life of Krishna as a child. He also translated the tenth book of the

Bhagavata. He was in all probability the first to do this work, and being a poet of real merit, he helped in making this Purana popular in the Province.

The tenth book of the Bhagavata, which deals with the life of Krishna as a child and a boy, seems to have been a great favourite with the poets of the following two or three centuries. Several of these translated it into Gujarati, there being as many as a dozen translations thereof. Three or four of these poets translated the entire Purana. This shows the extreme popularity of the Bhagavata, especially the tenth book thereof, and the immense attraction it had for all.

The greatest of these poets was Premananda. So great is he as a poet and the services rendered by him to the cause of Gujarati literature are so outstanding that he forms a class by himself. Until he appeared, there was little of Gujarati literature worth the name. A number of poets had come before him, their line extending over some centuries, but the work done so far was far from what constitutes great literature. These poets had not written with an eye to the creation of literature as such, and they never thought in terms of the provincial language or literature. Premananda was the first to feel that the Province of Gujarat should have a literature of its own. He eagerly desired it to be such as might stand comparison with any of the provincial literatures of India as in Hindi or Marathi, or even with that in Sanskrit. The fashion prevailing among most of the poets until his time was to write in both Hindi and Gujarati, and between these two the preference was given invariably to the former. If they wrote in Gujarati, it was by way of accommodation to people speaking a vulgar tongue. Premananda himself had fallen a prey to this tendency, from which he was rudely awakened by a timely taunt from a Sannyasi called Ramcharana Harihara. The latter was a kind of *Guru*, Teacher, to him, and being a Gujarati by birth, he once said to Premananda when the latter showed him some of his compositions in Hindi:

“Are you not proud of your mother-tongue ? Why do you write in Hindi ? ” This remark, made at a most opportune moment, could not have found a better place to lodge in than the sensitive spirit of the poet. Premananda took the rebuke to heart and made up his mind that he would not rest until he had put Gujarati on a worthy pedestal by the side of the great vernaculars of India. He took a vow that he would not cover his head, which meant a state of mourning, so long as he did not create by his own unaided efforts a literature that was truly great both in quality and quantity in Gujarati. He dedicated himself to this worthy cause from that day to the end of his life.

The result of this vow on the part of Premananda is writ large in the field of Gujarati literature. His name is not merely written but ploughed in the history of the language and culture of Gujarata. He lived to be nearly a hundred years old, from 1636 to 1734 A. D., during which long period he wrote a number of first-class works in poetry. These are as many as fifty-seven, most of them in the form of *Akhyanas*, stories, written in such a simple manner that even people without much education can understand them. Mr. K. M. Munshi says that “he used his art so skilfully that the *akhyana* became like a modern novel, an elastic medium for all literary purposes.” Most of his subjects he took from the Puranas, which made his compositions all the more popular and gave them a currency which it was not possible for them to have otherwise. He struck out also a new path for himself by choosing for some of his poems notable events from the life of the Gujarati saint Narasimha Mehta. This is in all probability his most important contribution to the religious life of the Province. With true insight he saw that God had worked in modern times in Gujarata as He had done in ancient times elsewhere, and he sang of these acts of God in his matchless manner. He wrote three *Akhyanas* dealing with some of the episodes of the saint’s life narrating them with his inimitable skill. This helped much in enshrining Narasimha Mehta in the hearts of the people of Gujarata.

Premananda was, thus, the first writer of the Gospel of the grace of God as manifested in the life of the saint. It was in the writing of these *Akhyanas* that the vow he had made was fulfilled beyond his highest expectations, because he had glorified not only his own language but the *Lila* of God performed in the Province. The influence of these three works on the popular mind has been so great as to elicit from Dewan Bahadur K. M. Zaveri this praise: "To this day not a single individual, man or woman, who claims to be a native of Gujarata, will be found unaquainted with either one or the other of his poems on these subjects."

A most remarkable feature of Premananda's life was the creation by him of what we may well call an academy of poets and writers. These are said to be as many as fifty-two, and twelve of them were women. One wonders if there has been anything like such a body anywhere else in the field of literature. Incidentally this shows that the women of those times, which we sometimes contemptuously speak of as medieval, were not as illiterate and backward as we imagine them to be. Even to-day with all the boasted advance of women and the large cultivation of Gujarati language and literature, it is doubtful if we have as many poets or writers among them.

It is worth noting that the last work of Premananda was a translation of the tenth book of the Bhagavata. This is spoken of by Diwan Bahadur Zaveri as "one of his best poems." That he should have reserved the writing of this work till the last moment of his life or at any rate thought of taking it up then shows in what regard he held the book. In all probability he meant it to be the crowning-point of his literary career.

Premananda is one of the three great poets of Gujarata, the other two being Narasimha Mehta and Dayarama. These three poets filled the literary horizon before what is called the modern period began, and Premananda is supreme among them because of

his many gifts and the high quality and large volume of his work. He differs from the other two in not allowing his literary work to be dominated by any definite religious belief. This gives his poetry a greater human interest and a wider appeal. It does suffer, however, from a corresponding lack of depth in comparison with the work of both Narasimha Mehta and Dayarama. Anyway, Premananda is one of the greatest stars in the firmament of Gujarati literature, and his place is assured as long as the language lasts.

As has been said before, Premananda had a number of disciples, the two most notable of whom were his son Vallabha and Ratneshwara. The latter translated the whole of the Bhagavata into Gujarati, for which service of his to the cause of Vaishnavism he was called the Vyasa of the Kali Yuga by one of the Acharyas of the Vallabha Sampradaya. He is spoken of as "a Vaishnava, a devotee of Radha Krishna" by Mr. Zaveri, though we are not sure if he belonged to the Church of Vallabha. He translated, besides, the Bhagawad-Gita into Gujarati.

By the time these two poets were writing their works, the Church of Vallabha seems to have made much progress in Gujarata, and a number of poets are said to have sung the praises of Bala-Krishna in accordance with the teachings of the new faith. This was a period of much social and political upheaval, especially as the Mogul power was on the wane. There was a decadence of life in general and literature is said to have partaken of the same. The late Mr. Govardhanarama Tripathi, a notable literary figure of the modern period, writes of the state of things prevailing then in his book *The Classical Poets of Gujarata* as follows:

"But as soon as the century was over and the political anarchy and chaos of the next century placed the country at the mercy of not only political but even religious and moral invaders, the apostles of Vallabha poured into the country, and men and women, mostly Banias, accepted this new dispensation of madness.



Those who would have been poets with sound brains in ordinary times, began to advocate and assist the new creed in this century of moral and political anarchy. Some twelve poets, directly or indirectly attached to this faith, supply the country during this period with an imbecile kind of poetry, where we generally miss the vigour and philosophy of Narasimha as well as the gentle poetry of Mira. The greatest of these poets were the Bania Giridhara and the Brahman Dayarama, and Dayarama is infinitely in advance of Giridhara. Dayarama lived at Dabhoi and died as late as 1852 or so. So far as poetical powers are concerned, he is undoubtedly the greatest genius since the days of Premananda."

We have looked carefully into the history of Gujarati literature to find out the truth behind this charge made by so important a person as Mr. Tripathi. We are sorry to say, however, that the indictment is more the result of prejudice against the new movement which Mr. Tripathi as a Sanatanist had against it than of any careful search after truth on his part. The political anarchy that came into the province along with the fall of the Mogul Empire did certainly bring along with it a kind of world-weariness into literature, but it allied itself more easily with the Vedanta of Shankara than with the Vaishnavism of Vallabha. Mr. K. M. Munshi, another important literary figure, begins his account of the history of this period with these words: "Under conditions such as these described, literature could only echo Akho's weary gospel." Now Akho was the most outstanding exponent of the Vedantic teaching, and thus the charge is brought home to Mr. Tripathi's own school of thought rather than to that of the Church of Vallabha. We have, besides, carefully looked into the lists of the poets of this period as given by both Diwan Bahadur Zaveri and Mr. Munshi, and we find few Banias among them, whereas there are several Brahmins. Moreover, according to Mr. Tripathi's own showing, the greatest of these "imbecile" poets is Dayarama, who was a Brahmin of as high a standing as Mr. Tripathi himself. There are a few poets among the Banias in this period, but they

belong mostly to the Jain community. As for Giridhara, he was a follower of the Vallabha Sampradaya, but his chief work is a translation of the Ramayana.

In view of this we wonder if it would not be more proper to say that it was the followers of Vallabha and the poets who had received their inspiration from his new dispensation, who kept the flag of a living faith in God and in the reality of the world as the theatre of His *Lila* flying, at a time when darkness was prevailing all over this part of India. The one great thing about this faith is that it does not preach an escape from the world, nor is it defeatist in its mentality. It may have been puerile at times, even effeminate and epicurean, but it stuck to its guns when almost all other people surrendered themselves to fatalism and pessimism. In fact it seems to be the only positive religion of the times in the Province, and it was in all probability due to this fact that it was able to make so deep and wide an appeal to its people. It soon found a voice, which was one of the most powerful not only in its own history but in the entire range of Gujarati literature. This was no other than Dayarama, who has been mentioned elsewhere in this book.

Dayarama was born in 1767 A. D. in Chandoda, a small place situated on one of the banks of the river Narmada. He was a born genius and like many poets he allowed himself to be guided by his momentary impulses for perhaps a good while. There were perhaps few places in the whole of Gujarata more suited to the growth of his genius than Chandoda where he was bred up in his early years. The river Narmada flows by it in all its majesty making the country extremely fertile and rich in greenery and woods of beautiful and fruit-bearing trees. This is the biggest river in Gujarata, the only one that could be compared, if at all, with Yamuna or Ganges. The close proximity of such a river had given the people of Chandoda a spirit of adventure, and even the women of the place had a fair share of the same.

These latter, at any rate in those days, were strong, sturdy and attractive, and they enjoyed greater freedom than the majority of women in the province. Dayarama along with other boys of his age loved to play pranks with them, a game in which the boys did not always come out as winners. A pretty wild life the poet lived until he was nineteen or twenty years old, when his aunt, who was his sole guardian after his parents' death, passed away. This broke up whatever home he had and leaving Chandoda he settled in Dabhoi.

Dayarama seems to have come across, at this stage of his life, a man called Keshavananda, probably a Sannyasi, who is said to have weaned him from his wild ways. He acknowledged him as a Guru and turned a new leaf in his life, at any rate for the time being. The "old man" within him was too strong to be tamed easily. It seems to us that from his early youth onwards, there were two voices within him, one calling him to the gratification of his senses and pride and vanity, and the other to the dedication of his life to God. The struggle between these two lasted perhaps for a long time, the former yielding slowly but surely to the latter.

Another most important phase of Dayarama's life was reached when he adopted the faith of Vallabha. This was signalized by the change of his name from Dayashankar to Dayarama. It was a case of real conversion, brought about through the instrumentality of one Ichchharama Bhatta. This man was a true follower of Vallabha and was known in his neighbourhood for miles around as a man of high character and much devotion to God. We do not know when this change in the life of Dayarama took place. In all probability it was in his twenties that he adopted the new faith. Soon after he started for a pilgrimage all over India. He went at first to Sri Nathdwara temple, the chief shrine of the Church of Vallabha, and he is said to have taken his *Brahma-Sambandha* at this place. Religion now became a passion

with him and he probably made up his mind now to devote himself wholly to God.

Dayarama is said to have gone round the whole of India visiting the various places of pilgrimage, especially the four great centres, Badrikashrama in the north, Jagannatha Puri in the East, Rameshwara in the South and Dwarka in the West, no less than three or four times. This shows the strength of his passion for religion. He had many strange experiences in the course of these pilgrimages, some of them bordering on the miraculous. It was probably during this period that he came to experience a kind of special relationship between himself and Krishna, and became conscious of having a special mission in his life

Having finished his travels and pilgrimages, Dayarama settled down in Dabhoi to do his life-work. He was already thirty years old by this time. In all probability he would have married and settled down to a householder's life, but no man of his caste could be found to entrust his daughter to one who had neither family-connections worth the name, nor means, and who was besides something of a vagrant and a free spirit to boot. He then took for his partner in life, "for weal and woe," to quote his own words, a widow of the name Ratanbai, belonging to the goldsmith's caste. This lady, being widowed in early life, was devoted to religion, and it was probably in the fellowship of the Vaishnavas that she came to know the poet. She had great admiration for him and consecrated herself to his service. They lived together for thirty years as husband and wife for all practical purposes, a regular marriage being impossible for them in those days as she belonged to a different caste. A heroic little woman, she managed the household of the poet, nursed him tenderly in his many illnesses, and bore with much patience and long-suffering the outbursts of his wild temper. It is doubtful if Dayarama would have been able to do half his literary work without her. He paid generous tribute to her and made provision for her from his scanty



means after his death. She was robbed of this unfortunately by his relations and lived a life of much hardship until she passed away some fourteen years later.

This settling down in life with Ratanbai on the part of Dayarama was perhaps his last act of irregularity. It was such only apparently, for thereby he offended nothing but the social conventions of his day. It is said that he invoked and got the blessings of one of the Goswamis of the Church of Vallabha on his union with her, which, if true, is creditable both to him and to the Goswami. Unions of this kind, though extremely rare, have been recognised and given a sort of religious sanction both by this Church and that of Chaitanya, modifying thus the rigours of the caste-system to some extent. It was due to some caste-prejudice lurking within him that Dayarama cooked the meals for both Ratanbai and himself. Some of the scholars of this Church are at pains to show that the relationship between them had nothing irregular about it, thinking that any such connection between the two is a serious reflection on the character of the poet. We, on the other hand, think that he was much in advance of his times, and that it was heroic of him to have lived with Ratanbai in the way he did. For both him and her it was nothing less than a marriage-bond, entered into before God and very probably before the Church, which bound them together, and in their eyes it had all the validity of a regular marriage, if not more.

Dayarama was a highly æsthetic person in the good sense of the term, and he remained such to the end of his days. Handsome in appearance, he dressed himself almost as well as any person of his time. He ate well and drank *Bhanga*, a kind of mild intoxicant, off and on. Evidently life here on this earth was meant for him to be lived, and not to be shunned or renounced. His æstheticism, however, was kept within bounds by his extreme independence, which kept him always poor. He knew well his mission and place as a poet, which he would not barter for anything



in the world. He was proud, vain and irascible, which was an integral part of his self-consciousness.

The thing most worthy of note about Dayarama is that, with all his foibles and defects, some of them serious, he dedicated himself entirely to his mission as a poet-singer of God's praises and glories. Perhaps in his early life he had come to believe that he was spiritually related to Narasimha Mehta. Some of the Vaishnavas of the Church of Vallabha have spoken of him as the great Bhakta reborn again. He speaks of himself as one of "the eight friends" of Vallabha and Vitthala, in all probability Nandadasjee come again to life. His faith in the teachings of Vallabha was deep and intense, and he took it upon himself to place them before the people of Gujarata in as beautiful and attractive a manner as possible.

Dayarama was a devoted disciple of the Vallabha Sampradaya. He had taken his *Brahma-Sambandha* in what may be called the beginning of his religious life, and probably by the time he had settled down, he had adopted the stage of life called *Pucca Maryada*. This is an advanced state of discipleship in which the believer surrenders himself almost, if not altogether, wholly to God. Dayarama could not have taken to it but for the fact that he wanted to follow in his life as thoroughly as possible the teachings of the new faith.

Dayarama was possessed of various poetic gifts of a high order, which he now consecrated to the cause of Vallabha's Church. He was a first-class lyrical poet, the best Gujarata has known so far, and his outstanding work is in the form of *Garbis*, songs sung chiefly by women while going round and round in a kind of rhythmic dance. This Garbi-dance is peculiar to this province and it has given to its women a kind of self-expression which their sisters of other Provinces in India lack. These *Garbas*, as they are called, when sung at night, especially in moon-light when all things put

on an unearthly garb, express the soul of Gujarata as perhaps few things do, and Dayarama's *Garbis* stand unrivalled among them. He poured forth his deepest emotions in these lyrics, which reach the acme of perfection in language, sentiment and melody. The peculiar feature of these *Garbis* is that they reach the peak of literature as well as devotion to God, a matter in which they are unique. While composing them Dayarama assimilated himself to the character of the Gopis, calling himself Daya, the feminine form of his name. In them we find the soul of the poet revealed at its best, the soul of a poet and a *Bhakta*, and the immense popularity they have enjoyed since his time has made it possible for them to carry the message of *Krishna-bhakti* to all classes of people in the province. In this he stands second only to Narasimha Mehta. The charge of too much subjectivity is brought against his *Garbis* by some critics, but they forget that this constitutes their chief glory.

The *Bhakti* which finds expression in these *Garbis* is of the *Sringara* type, which is due to the fact that Dayarama was essentially a love-mystic. This was perhaps the only way in which he had sublimated his sex-feeling, and he gave full rein to the expression of his love-mysticism in varied and beautiful forms.

Next to the *Garbis* in importance among Dayarama's compositions are his expository poems. There are several of these, some small and others pretty large in size. Among these *Rasika Vallabha* is the most important both for its size and subject-matter. The poet presents therein the philosophical and religious teaching of Vallabha in a beautiful garb. The poem is written with the express purpose of refuting the Mayavada of Shankara and commending the Pure Monism of Vallabha. None had done such work before his time in poetry either in Sanskrit or in *Vraja-bhasha*, which shows the poet's zeal for the teaching of Vallabha and originality of conception. He had before him a subject that was great indeed, but it was extremely difficult to handle in the form of poetry, the more so as none had tried it.

before. He, however, took it in hand and filled what were more or less the dry bones of the philosophy of *Shuddhadvaita*, the Pure Monism of Vallabha, with flesh and blood. He made it thus a living reality, commending it thereby to all students of poetry and literature. The very name of the poem signifies this. His treatment of this subject, abstruse as it is, is so good as to evoke enthusiastic admiration on the part of the late Mr. Tripathi. In his *Classical Poets of Gujarata*, this author had criticised Dayarama as well as the teaching of Vallabhacharya very severely, looking upon them as almost vulgar intruders upon the field of Hindu Sanatana Dharma and Gujarati Literature. He now made ample amends to both by writing a book of over a hundred pages devoted to a proper exposition of the poetry of Dayarama. This book *Kavi Dayarama no Akshardeha*, the poetic soul of Dayarama as contrasted with his life, has become almost a classic in Gujarati literature as showing criticism at its best.

*Bhakti-Poshana*, Development and Growth of Devotion, is another poem of four hundred lines in which Dayarama gives the teaching of Vallabha on Bhakti. This is a noble poem enumerating and describing the chief characteristics of devotion according to *Pusti-Marga*, showing it to be the only proper and easy path of salvation for all sorts of people. His *Pusti-Path-Rahasya*, the Secret of the Path of Pusti, *Guru-Shishya-Samvada*, a Dialogue between a teacher and a disciple, *Sri Hari Bhakti Chandrika*, etc., are poems dealing with the religious teaching of the Vallabha sect in the same way. His *Bhagawad-Gita-Mahatmya* is a poem in which he glorifies the great Scripture by showing how the reading or the repetition of each of its eighteen chapters has worked wonders in the past.

He wrote a few *Akhyanas*, stories in poetry, drawn from the Puranas, such as *Ajamila Akhyana*, *Satyabhama Vivaha*, *Rukhmani Vivaha* etc., in the style of Premananda. These are not in his best style, his genius being essentially lyrical. The poet wrote, besides, a number of small poems in the nature of exhortations to people

to lead a life of moral purity, detachment from the world and devotion to God. These, being addressed primarily to himself, breathe forth a spirit of deep humility, consciousness of sin and burning anguish owing to the pain of separation from God.

The poet was a man of varied gifts. He had a fine melodious voice and a delicate ear for music. Himself a musician, he could play upon several instruments. He used to sing his own songs before his friends and admirers, to whom it must have been a treat to hear him. He was, besides, a scholar of Sanskrit and knew several vernaculars so well that he wrote poetry in them. He used Hindi, Vraja-bhasha and Marathi in this way, especially the first of these. He was as much at home in Hindi as in Gujarati, and his works in that language are, both in quality and quantity, almost as important as those in Gujarati.

The most important of Dayarama's compositions in Hindi is *Sat-saiyya*, a poem of about fourteen hundred lines. It reveals the great genius of the poet in one of its best aspects. It opens with a Prelude in the form of a prayer, which reaches almost the peak of humility and devotion. This is followed by an exceedingly fine description of true love or *Bhakti*, which alone pleases God. Then we have a number of illustrations of such love drawn by the poet from his rich imagination and attributed by him to the Gopis. Here again the poet reaches the peak in his description of the various modes of *Sringara*, the devotion of the type of sexual love. This gives an appearance of lewdness and indecency to the poem, but the poet has in mind nothing else but devotion to God at its highest. There were poems in Hindi before his time, which described love, sexual love, in the same way, but Dayarama, it would seem, tried to turn the tide of such love in the direction of divine love by writing this poem. The major part of the poem is thus devoted to a description of the various phases of *Sringara Rasa*, with this difference, however, that here the centre of such love is Krishna who, to the poet, is no other than



God Himself. To Dayarama, such love for God is the only true love, all others being spurious. The poem is difficult to understand, for apart from the fact that it is full of many poetic conceits of a high order, the thought throughout the whole is extremely condensed. He wrote a commentary on the poem in Gujarati in order to make its meaning clear. So far as we know this is the only poem of its kind written by him. It was written in the early period of his life, when he was not perhaps altogether free from the "old man" within himself.

Dayarama wrote, besides, a number of poems in Hindi and Vraja-Bhasha, contributing thus an important quota to the literature of the Church of Vallabha in the whole of Western India. Some of these are *Rasika-Ranjana*, *Sidhdhanta-Sara*, *Sri Bhakti-Vidhana*, etc., etc.. The first two are in the style of his *Rasika-Vallabha* in Gujarati, his aim being to commend the philosophical teaching of Vallabha. The third is similar to his *Bhakti-Poshana* in Gujarati. His *Sri Krishna-Stavanamrita* and *Sri Krishna-Stavana-Chandrika* are two master-pieces as Hymns of praise of Sri Krishna.

Our poet wrote in all about fifty works, big and small, which reflects no small credit on him. The quality of most of these is so high and remarkable that even the most captious critics of the poet have been constrained to give him a place among the immortals of Gujarata. Indeed, his place as one of the greatest poets of the Province is assured for ever. So far he is one of the three great poet-stars of Gujarata, the other two being Narasimha Mehta and Premananda. From the point of view of religion, his work is of much greater significance than that of Premananda. Even the modern period, which began with the advent of the Western education, has seen none who can be compared with Dayarama. He is, besides, more than a provincial poet, and belongs rightly to the whole of India by virtue of his work in Hindi. He wrote some small poems in Marathi also.



Looking to the times in which Dayarama lived and the comparative paucity of the materials available for study in the absence of printed books, libraries, Universities etc., we can not but wonder at both the quantity and quality of his work. This can be attributed only to his great genius and amazing industry. Even these would not have availed him much if they did not have as their foundation a life of complete consecration to God and a sense of divine mission. He had taken a vow of service to God, in the fulfilment of which he remained a poor man all his days. His sole means of maintenance were his writings, a most precarious way of living in those days when printing had not yet become common in India. He read his poems before his disciples and admirers, eking out a pittance therefrom of Rs. 200 a year, which was not much even at that time. His was a life of poverty, especially for one who had a high æsthetic sense of living. The thing worthy of note in connection with the life of Dayarama and his two worthy successors, Dalpatram and Narmadashankar, two outstanding poets of the modern period, is that Literature was prized more in their days than it is to-day. The poets and the authors then had a better sense of a mission in life than those of to-day. They did not commercialise their profession, nor did they do their work in their hours of leisure as is done by most of our present-day authors.

The end of Dayarama was a fitting climax to a life lived unto great purposes. He had gathered together in the course of his life round about him a number of disciples, who were deeply devoted to him. These served him in his last illness along with Ratanbai to the best of their ability. One of them, Ranachhoda, who stood nearest to him in spirit, requested him for permission to worship his sandals after he was gone. Dayarama gave to him this reply: "I am a disciple of Krishna. How can a disciple have disciples?" He then added: "My dear mad fellow, who am I that my sandals should be worshipped? When the sandals of even Sri Krishna are not worshipped, to worship those of mine, who am not even the dust of the dust of the feet of Sri Krishna, is

pure madness. Now my time is up, and my sole command to you is that you should sing my songs and thereby preach the *Bhakti* of Krishna. I have made myself well-known all over Hindustan. I shall no more be born or die. My life in this world has its purpose fulfilled, and I have attained the end of human life, which is salvation....." He then gave minute instructions regarding the purification of his body after his death etc., and added: "Make this an occasion of joyful festivity. Do not cry over it. Whosoever does so is not my disciple. My good fellows, I have secured fame by singing the name of Sri Krishna, and if I go now to Him, why should any one cry over it ? "

These death-bed words and instructions show him to be one who has come out triumphant in his struggles against the flesh and the world. Whatever may have been his sins and foibles, a matter in which many of his fellow-believers believe him to be innocent of the charges brought against him, the poet reveals himself to be at perfect peace with God, believing himself to be fully justified and saved by the grace of God. In view of these words of his, even his worst sins which he may have committed in the early part of his life, appear to us of little moment. Rather he shows himself all the greater on that account, for he has overcome them and thus given to the world one more example of the marvellous working of the grace of God. Our study of his poetry has created in us profound respect for him and has led us to believe that he was one of those favoured few whom God chooses off and on to show the world the omnipotence of His grace.

Dayarama was a poet and a love-mystic of a high order, and as such he offers a most interesting psychological problem for the study of religious conversion wrought by the *Bhakti* of the *Sringara* type. He was probably just the type of men whom the author of the *Bhagavata* had in mind when he wrote the *Rasa-panchadhyayi* in the tenth book of that Purana. He says therein that the *Rasa-Lila* of Sri Krishna is described specially for the

purpose of weaning sensual people from their sex-obsession. This was exemplified in Dayarama to a remarkable extent. Had he not come across this type of Bhakti, in all likelihood he would have stayed away from religion altogether and written poetry of the secular kind. In case he had experienced conversion in a form of religion that was ascetic, unless there had been a wholesale change in him, the resulting tension would have been too great within him to leave much room for creative effort. He would not have been then the poet that he came to be. This is just what happened in the case of Manishankar Bhatta, a poet of the modern period. He had rich talents and was something of a mystic. Early in life he came under the influence of the teachings of Swedenborg, and joined one of the Protestant Christian Churches of Gujarata. He soon left his association with the Christians for various social and religious reasons. He was then thrown entirely on his own resources, and although the faith he professed, viz., Swedenborgianism, is anything but ascetic which much of Christianity is, the spiritual tension in his life was so great that all his poetic inspiration dried up. He was in all probability the only poet of real merit after Dayarama, who had a profound faith in religion and in a definite system of belief, but his output of religious poetry has been practically nil. In spirit he had much in common with Dayarama, but owing to the extreme moral and religious tension, which lasted till the end of his life, his poetic genius ended in a tragic failure.

The question that we have propounded here is too big and complicated to be answered easily. It may be that Dayarama had something in himself, some dynamic power of his own, which resulted in such large creative efforts. It would not be proper, therefore, to generalize from his case or that of Mr. Bhatta. The thing that seems certain to us, however, is that the transition from what is called the natural man in us to the Sringara type of Bhakti is easier to make than the one to an ascetic form of religion. This latter involves severe tension between the two selves, the higher and the lower, of a man, and hence it is apt to smother whatever feeling

for beauty and art one may have within himself. It is likely to destroy whatever is good in human nature as endowed by God, while the other fulfills and perfects it. In other words the transition from a love of natural beauty to spiritual beauty is more easy to make than the one from moral evil to spiritual good.

Another generalization that we may draw here in connection with this matter is that in all the forms of the religion of Bhakti, including Judaism, Christianity and Islam, the highest religious poetry has found its spontaneous expression in the Bhakti of the Sringara type. As for Judaism, some of the noblest passages of its religious poetry and prophetic teaching are those in which the prophets speak of Israel as the Bride of Jehovah. On the other hand the worst denunciation they make of Israel takes the form of comparing it with a woman who has not been true to her vows of conjugal fidelity. In Islam the greatest religious poetry was given utterance to by the Sufis, who looked upon God as the Beloved and upon themselves as the lovers. The difference between the Sufis and the Hindu Bhaktas of the type of Narasimha Mehta, Mirabai and Dayarama lies only in the reversal of the parts played by both God and His devotees. The former related themselves to God as His lovers, while the latter did so as His *Gopis*, the beloved ones. In connection with this matter, it is worth noting that Sufi poetry appeared at its best only in Persia, where the dogmatic and institutional aspects of Islam had a weak hold on the public mind. It is true there is not much Bhakti of this kind in Christianity as compared with Hinduism and Islam, which is strange because it is a much fuller form of Bhakti-religion than both Judaism and Islam. This lack is largely due to the extremely centralised power of the Roman Catholic Church for centuries over the mind and soul of Europe. All through its long history, this Church has been so zealous in preserving and expanding its power that it did not allow much free and spontaneous expression of religious feeling. Mysticism and Poetry are too delicate flowers of the human spirit to grow under the stifling atmosphere of a supremely centralised Church.



There was, nevertheless, some expression given to this type of Mysticism even in the Roman Catholic Church, as we have mentioned elsewhere in the present work. In all probability a large number of monks and nuns, especially the latter, in the medieval ages found much spiritual solace and joy in this kind of Bhakti, and were helped much by it in sublimating their sex-instinct. It is true it has not found much expression in 'poetry, which accounts for the fact of the comparative poverty of the Christian Church in religious poetry. In spite of all the boasts of the Christian propagandists that Christianity is a religion that preaches affirmation of life while Hinduism does the reverse, the former started as a negation of life and has continued to do so until our own times. This negation was taken over by much of Protestantism in the form of Puritanism, and the Protestant Churches have been, besides, all along too full of the dissidence of dissent to give rise to art of any kind, let alone religious poetry.

Dewan Bahadur Krishnalal Zaveri, who is a deep student of Gujarati and Persian Literature, rightly compares Dayarama with such Sufis as Hafez and Maulana Rumi. This is enough to give our poet a place among the great ones of the earth. He was a poet as well as a mystic of a high order, who had, besides, the rare courage to identify himself wholly with a particular Church. He surrendered himself body, soul and mind to the Vaishnavism of Vallabha, which to our mind constitutes his chief glory. He had the true humility and faith of a man of God, both of them qualities which are indeed divine and come to one only by the grace of God. His greatness lies in this that he did not consider himself to be superior to any definite form of religion as most poets and writers in their spiritual blindness are apt to do. By his loyalty to his faith, Dayarama enriched himself, his Church and the whole of Gujarata. He has given a wide currency and an abiding place to the teaching of the Sampradaya of Vallabha among the people of Gujarata by his manifold poetic compositions and the example of a life which showed the triumph of the



Spirit over Nature. By the time he appeared, the Church of Vallabha had spread far and wide in Gujarata and he added much to its strength. He enshrined its spirit and teachings in his beautiful poems, thereby raising a temple which no human hands could build. The Vaishnavism of Narasimha Mehta, Mirabai and many others, which was hitherto floating in the air, became crystallized now into a definite form of belief and practice. Henceforth Vaishnavism in Gujarata was identified, almost if not altogether, with the creed of Vallabha.

The story of the spread of the Bhagavata Dharma in Gujarata, however, does not end here. At the very time when Dayarama was composing and singing his poems, there appeared in Gujarata a Bhakti-movement of the deepest moral and religious significance. This is the one identified with the name of Sri Swami Narayana. He was one of the greatest teachers of the Bhagavata Dharma that not only Gujarata but the whole of India has known. Swami Narayana Sampradaya, by which name his Church is known, started in Gujarata and has been largely confined to it. As a Vaishnava Church it is unique in many ways. One of its many glories is that it reached classes and communities which were left untouched by the faith of Vallabha. The history of this Church deserves a book by itself.\*

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\* A biography of Sri Swami Narayana has already appeared as a book in this Series.

## CHAPTER V

### **Cultural Influence of Vallabhi Vaishnavism**

We have already seen that from early times the movement of Vallabha started its course of expansion in the West of India, whereas that of Sri Chaitanya went eastwards. Both these had their headquarters in the Vraja-land, but they came to realize very wisely that their spheres of influence and work lay in opposite directions, with the result that each went its own way. This saved them from much overlapping of effort and friction which would have been inevitable. The division of area which had thus taken place was providential and resulted in much good to millions of people of the land from one end to the other. The Vraja-land which had been associated with the name and early life of Krishna for two thousand years at least became for the first time a great store-house of spiritual life, and rivers of devotion flew therefrom both eastwards and westwards.

The movement of Vallabha, with which we are mainly concerned here, spread in several provinces, viz., Mewar, Marwar, Malwa, Gujarata and even Sindh to some extent. It became in all these parts a powerful religious and cultural influence leavening the life of the people in many directions. It was able to do this perhaps more easily than any other Vaishnava movement largely because Jainism had preceded and prepared the ground for it for

several centuries. Whatever be the reasons, this religion had flourished in Western India for at least five hundred years before Vallabha appeared as nowhere else. Its principle and practice of Non-violence including the strictest of vegetarianism, and regard and reverence for all life, had exerted a most wholesome and refining influence on the morals and manners of all people including those who did not profess the faith. Under its powerful and pervasive influence many communities had given up meat-eating even when they did not accept it. What is more significant is that some of the biggest Rajput Princes, especially in Gujarata, adopted this faith. This gave a new turn to the life of the entire Province. What happened to the whole, or at any rate, to a large part of India under Asoka and some of his successors, took place in Gujarata under Kumarpala in the latter half of the twelfth century. The Jaina influence, however, in the Province of Gujarata had started long before, and the Jainas had established themselves so well that they held in Vallabhipur the important conference of their Sadhus which redacted the Jaina Canon known as Vallabhi Vachan.

The Province of Gujarata proved so fertile a field for the labours of the Jaina missionaries that they made it in course of time almost a holy land of their own. Their finest temples are found in this province, on Mt. Abu in the north, and on Mt. Girinara and Mt. Setrunjaya in Kathiawad, which, along with Kutchha, belongs to Gujarata by deep linguistic and cultural ties. This does not mean that the influence of Jainism did not pervade Rajputana and Malwa: if at all, it was only a shade less there than in Gujarata. Col. Todd, in his well-known book *Rajasthana* pays the Jainas a glowing tribute again and again for their high character, noble philanthropy and social service. With their remarkable qualities the Jainas contributed to the civilization of the whole of Rajputana an ethical and spiritual element which evoked enthusiastic admiration on the part of this noble Englishman. To him, it would seem, they were the salt of Rajasthana.

The humanizing influence of Jainism as a religion has been as great as that of any religion, if not greater. It is no exaggeration to say that it has been decidedly greater than even that of Buddhism and Christianity, the only two religions which have exercised the deepest influence on mankind. This is due to its extreme emphasis on Non-violence and rigid vegetarianism in diet. The present writer well remembers a remark that was made simultaneously and independently of each other both by Mr. K. Natrajan, the well-known editor of *The Indian Social Reformer*, and the late Mr. Hem Chandra Sarkar, a widely travelled Brahma Missionary of Bengal, that Gujarata had a civilization of its own. He then replied to them that it was true, and that it was the result of the pervasive influence of Jainism, an explanation which both of them found satisfying. The extremely tender regard for all life which characterises the people of Gujarata sets them apart from all other peoples in India. It is interesting to observe that even the Moslems share this feeling to some extent. One reason for this is that a large number of Mohammedans in Gujarata have come from some of the higher castes, and they have still preserved much of their racial and cultural heritage. For example the Bohras, a very respectable community of Gujarata, are Brahmins in origin, and Memans, another mercantile community of importance, come from the Lohanas. The Khojas too are drawn largely from the Vaishya communities. These Moslems have preserved so much of their heritage that until very recently they were governed by the Hindu Law.

We might add here that this extreme emphasis on Non-violence on the part of Jainism has much to do with limiting its influence to a smaller sphere than is the case with both Buddhism and Christianity. This made it impossible for it to go beyond India, especially to such countries as China and Japan in the east, and Afghanistan and Persia in the north. The people of these lands had neither the preparation for such teaching as was the case with the Aryans in India, nor would the rigours of the climate in their parts allow them even to think of

writer well remembers a case which took place more than forty years ago in his own town. A wanton attack was made by the Moslems on Hindus in which some people were grievously hurt. Then the local Bania Mahajana invited the leading men of all the Hindu communities including the Untouchables to deliberate what should be done. They all unanimously decided on a total boycott of the Moslems. As soon as the latter knew of this they came and tendered their apologies for what they had done and expressed their desire to make whatever reparation the Mahajana thought proper to impose upon them. The quarrel was soon made up and peace reigned as before. This is not a solitary instance of the kind. These bodies followed a similar course of action even against Princes. With the advent of the modern democratic forms of government, much of the power of the Mahajanas has been taken over by bodies which are perhaps more representative of the entire public than the Mahajanas. Our Legislative Assemblies and Parliaments of to-day are Mahajanas in a more organised form. The thing worth noting here is that in the Mahajanas proper the Jainas took almost always the lead.

The humanizing process of Jainism mentioned above had far-reaching influence in the treatment of women. It is perhaps no exaggeration to say that among all the Hindus, using the term to include the Jainas, the position accorded to women by the latter is the highest. In India, the Jainas are the only people who have orders of nuns called *Sadhavis*, whose number is even greater than that of the *Sadhus*. These *Sadhavis*, moreover, have the privilege of preaching to mixed audiences, which no other body of women has in the world. The nuns make it their special work to look after the spiritual welfare of the women of the community, who are thus better cared for than those in any other. This is true especially of the widows, who, though not allowed to re-marry, are largely free from the disabilities and hardships which they have to bear in other communities. Such a cruel and inhuman custom as the Sutte has had no place among the Jainas for it



violated grievously their most cherished principle of Ahimsa, Non-Violence. A people who consider it their duty and privilege to take care of old and crippled animals at great cost to them in money and even personal labour would be the last to let their women suffer such a death.

The Jainas, because of their *Ahimsa*, took to peaceful occupations, chiefly commerce, since it alone is free from killing of any kind. They abstained from even agriculture as it involves killing of insects etc. Their concentration on business for centuries, together with their integrity, industry, temperate habits and thrift, made them possibly the richest community in India. For this as well as their qualities and gifts for business and trade, they have been compared with the Jews, and much more properly with the Quakers. They have undoubtedly more in common with the latter, with only this difference viz., that they have a history of twenty-five centuries and that their number is much larger than that of the Quakers. They are, besides, far more organized in the better sense of the term as a religious body than the latter, and their religious vitality is still far from exhausted.

The Jainas as a religious community have leavened the life of the whole of India throughout the course of their history, and what we call Hinduism to-day owes not a little to them. Their influence, however, came to be concentrated in Western India and Gujarata especially. One of their greatest men, Hemchandracharya, worked in Gujarata for more than fifty years, and made Jainism the predominant religion of the Province in the 12th. century. He was a saint, scholar, statesman and poet of extraordinary ability in every field. The results of his work and of that of hundreds of Sadhus before him and thousands after him changed the face of the land in many ways. We shall quote here a testimony to this given by an author called Vallabha in 1704 A. D.. In his poem *Mitradharmakhyana* he says:

“ I have seen many lands wandering over the earth. I have gone even beyond Attock witnessing wars. Every part has something to commend it, but it has also something lacking. It is only in good Gujarata, however, that you find men and women possessing food, drink and riches in abundance. This is not all, for they have something greater than these. Amongst feminine things the greatest is Maya, but there is one here eclipsing her as many will testify to it. This is *Daya*, Charity. Elsewhere this virtue appears just a little, but here it is found in abundance..... The people of Gujarata are merciful, charitable, honourable, wealthy and learned. Go to any part of India, but you will not find these qualities in such measure out of Gujarata.”

Western India, which includes for our purpose here, Rajputana, Malwa and Gujarata, has another advantage over other parts of India. This lies in the homogeneity of its population, culture and civilization. It is almost, if not altogether, Aryan in race and Hindu in religion. It has no Hindu-Moslem problem such as exists in the North or in the East, nor Aryo-Dravidian or Brahmin-Non-Brahmin problem as found in the South. Because of this its energies are not wasted in internecine strife. It is also due to this that the city of Bombay where the Gujaratis have the predominance in business and trade, has contributed more to the forging of Indian Nationalism than any other in the entire land.

The people of Western India, besides, are some of the most adventurous as traders in India. The Marwaris, driven from their desert-land by the urge of their inexhaustible vitality and love for money, have spread themselves all over India and secured much of its trade in their hands. The Gujaratis, who were much better off because of their fertile soil, have had the advantage of one of the finest sea-coasts in the whole country, and they have traded with distant shores both eastwards and westwards for more than two thousand years. During the last three or four centuries, its people, especially those of Cutch and Kathiawad, have spread themselves

not only all over India but have gone as far as Africa in the west and Burma, Java and Sumatra in the east. Besides being enterprising in business, they make good colonists, and their share in creating what is called Greater India is not a small one. What is of special interest is the fact that almost all classes of people have shared in this colonising movement. The result of this has been an influx of wealth which, being spread more evenly among all the people than elsewhere, has given rise to a very large middle-class. Gujarata is essentially a bourgeois country with all the virtues and vices of one. It hates extremes of all kinds and considers good living as of prime importance in life. As early as 1640, an author, Venkatadhvarin of Telangan, describes the characteristics of the people in a Sanskrit poem in these words:

“Look at this Gurjaradesha. It is full of wealth of all kinds, a kind of paradise. Its young men chew all the time the betal-leaf, made fragrant with camphor and sweet-smelling betel-nut. They put on fine, bright-coloured clothes, which evoke admiration: they also adorn themselves with shining jewellery. Their bodies are anointed with fragrant sandal-paste. They seek pleasure in company with damsels who are as beautiful as Rati herself.

“The beauty of the youthful women of this land is incomparable. Their skin is of the colour of molten gold, their lips soft and red, their hands delicate like tender sprouts, their speech nectar-like, their eyes full of the lustre of dark lotus. They are full of fascinating graces of all kinds.”

In spite of this good living of the people and the attractiveness of the women, the moral level of the people is very high as testified to by the following words of the same poet:

‘The people of Gujarata go to different lands, take note of the peculiar characteristics of the people thereof and acquire much wealth. With this they return to their land and rejoin their chaste

wives, who are extremely eager to meet them after long periods of separation. These blessed ones, full of riches, enjoy in this way happiness indescribable.”\*

A similar testimony to the chastity of the women of the Marwari community was given to the present writer in Bikaner by a Christian Indian evangelist, who was working in villages of that part. He paid a high tribute to the lofty character of the Jainas on the whole and the Sadhus in particular, going so far as to say that these practised as a group the Sermon on the Mount more thoroughly than any other group, Christian or non-Christian, that he knew. This testimony did not come as a surprise to us, for we had felt the same thing long since, having had an intimate acquaintance with the Jainas owing to our birth and breeding among them. What is worth noting in this connection is that the Jaina Sadhus practise such high precepts as are given in the Sermon on the Mount without ever knowing the latter, and they have been doing it ever since Mahavira gave them their Law, which was long before Jesus Christ appeared.

It was among such a people that the Vaishnavism of Vallabha appeared in the sixteenth century and introduced a new element in their life, culture and civilization which was lacking. Jainism, in spite of all its high and noble influence noticed above, is a negative creed. Its most serious lack is its denial of the existence of God, and in its eyes all life is entirely evil and meant to be shunned as such. If all the people did not leave the world under the influence of its teaching, it was only because most people are happily too much wedded to life here on earth to renounce it altogether at the behest of any religion, however powerful it be. This negative attitude towards life preached by Jainism was confirmed by the Vedānta of Shankara, and the people were longing, unconsciously

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\* Both these passages are quoted from *Gujarata and Its Literature* by K. M. Munshi.

though it be, for a more positive faith. This lack was made up by this form of Vaishnavism which preached life and joy in God. It was religious romanticism and though it came as a rebound with all the force of the swing of the pendulum to the other extreme, it helped much in restoring the equilibrium of life. It did something more than this inasmuch as it carried the life of the entire people to a higher level. Conserving many of the values of Jainism, it created among the people a passion for Bhakti. While it may be true that some of the best converts of the new movement came from the Jainas, it made a wide appeal and gathered disciples from other communities. It was perhaps in Gokulnatha's time that a number of Royal Houses of Rajputana adopted this faith. The Bhagavata-Dharma Renaissance was in full swing at that time in many parts of India, and Vallabha Sampradaya as an integral part thereof could not but prove very attractive to both Princes and People in Western India. It carried with it a humanitarian zeal which was lacking among certain classes. The effects of the new movement on personal and social life have been described by the late Col. Todd in his *Rajasthan* as follows:

“The predominance of the mild doctrines of Kanhya (Krishna) over the dark rites of Shiva is doubtless beneficial to Rajput society. Were the prevention of immolation the sole good resulting from their prevalence, that alone would conciliate our partiality: a real worshipper of Vishnu should forbid his wife following him to the pyre, as did recently the Bundi Prince. In fact their tenderness to animal life is carried nearly to as great an excess as with the Jainas who shed no blood.....They inculcate mercy towards all beings; though whether this feeling influences the mass must depend on the soil which receives the seed. ....But fortunately the princely worshippers are few in number; it is to the sons of commerce we must look for the effects of these doctrines; and it is my pride and duty to declare that I have known men of both sects, Vishnu and Jaina, whose integrity was spotless, and whose philanthropy was unbounded.”



The commercial people mentioned here are Banias, many of whom for aught we know were originally Jainas and carried over the traditions and values of Jainism to the new Church. The Church of Vallabha, however, reached beyond these to multitudes of others who stood lower in the hierarchy of social life, and gave them a new status, dignity and power for personal and social good. These were the Bhatias and the Lohanas who came to match in course of time the commercial activities of the Banias; and such artisan classes as *Sonis*, goldsmiths, *Sutars*, carpenters, *Kamsaras*, coppersmiths etc., etc.. There was a good sprinkling of Brahmins and a little of Nagirs also. All these people were bound together within the Church by a bond of fellowship which was deeper than that in any other religious community. This in itself served as a great liberating influence in the life of most of the followers.

The new religious movement, besides, brought with it a number of influences which shaped and moulded the life of the whole of Western India in a worthy manner. Vaishnavism on the whole is a woman's religion and this is especially true of the Vaishnavism of Vallabha and Chaitanya. Consequently wherever movements of both these teachers spread, women came to be appreciated and respected for their feminine qualities and virtues. Under the old dispensation, manhood had held sway to such an extent that woman was considered of little significance. Besides, under the influence of the ascetic ideals of the medieval ages she was looked upon as not only a 'weaker vessel' but even a "door to hell". All this changed and the woman as woman, because of her very weakness, which ultimately arose from her tenderness and self-sacrificing devotion to her husband and children, came to be looked upon as the ideal of human character. The pendulum swung to the other extreme to such an extent that men, especially the Vaishnavas of Vallabha's Church, began to assimilate their character to the feminine type represented by the Gopis. This was an aberration, but it shows the tendency of the new ideal introduced by the Church of Vallabha. Within the

fellowship itself, both men and women stood on terms of equality, and as the Church grew in numbers, its influence in this matter as in others spread far beyond its confines.

Another great and most wholesome influence that the Vallabhite form of Vaishnavism brought to bear on society in general was the new respect it created towards children. The God that it worshipped was Bala-Gopala, the Child-Krishna, and the members of the Church saw the reflection of God himself, their beloved Bala-Gopala, in every child. Not only were the children loved by the Vaishnavas in the usual way, but now a kind of divinity shone through them, and this gave a new orientation to domestic and social life. Both Jainism and Buddhism had taught tenderness towards all living creatures including children, but a new feature was added to it by giving it a touch of reverence and devotion. The treatment of children among the Hindus has compared all along very favourably with that among the Western people as acknowledged by many among the latter themselves. This is due largely to the influence of the two religions mentioned above, an influence which has been fortified and deepened by Vaishnavism.

The movement of Vallabha brought with it deep religious and moral influences which helped much in changing the life of the people of Western India. It was primarily a religious movement, its chief mission being to bring human souls into vital fellowship with God. But since it was one of positive religion and the God that it worshipped was Love, it could not but touch and transform much of the personal and social life of not only its followers but even of others. Its influence was deep and all-pervasive. It humanized the people and created among its followers a feeling of solidarity and brotherhood which transcended the bounds of caste and class. It conferred a new dignity on people who were considered low in the hierarchy of the Caste-system, and took away much of the sting from poverty. It helped much in raising woman from the position of dire spiritual and social inferiority

in which she had remained for centuries to one of equality with man. It also taught new respect for children and made people look upon them as almost divine.

The new movement brought with it, besides, much refinement in the manners of the people. It set before them new standards of cleanliness, both personal and domestic, which changed entirely the face of life for most of its followers. It came as a Cultural Renaissance bringing with it manifold changes in the life of the people. It brought in its train poetry, love of nature, of flowers, of beauty in many of its forms and a new development in many of the arts. We have already described some of these last in connection with the worship of the new faith. The art of cookery and decorative arts of various kinds have had a remarkable growth in the Church of Vallabha. Its large contribution to Literature and Hymnology in Sanskrit, Vraja-bhasha and Gujarati have been mentioned already.

The new religious movement, besides, proved a source of inspiration to the art of painting. What is known as Rajput art, whether of the Kangra valley or of Rajasthana, was largely Vaishnavite in character, and many of the greatest pictures thereof show the *Lila*, Sport of Krishna of various kinds. Some of the characteristics of these two schools of painting have been described by an author as follows:\*

“The Rajput art, Kangra and Rajasthani alike, is essentially Vaishnavite in character. Its themes are the same as those of contemporary Rajput poetry and religion; both are preoccupied with the same sense of a Kind and Beauteous God, with the same eager longing and mystical devotion, with the same delight in Nature and pure things. The painters deal in wonderful line and colour with the same anecdotes and legends—the Rasa Lila, the Playing on

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\*From *Ramananda to Ramtirtha*: a book published by Nateson & Co.

the Flute, the Loves of Radha, the Quelling of the Kaliya—which the profound poetry and religion of the times were already interpreting in terms of mystic love and faith. But the paintings, however, are no more translations in colour and line of the Vaishnava legends, but in themselves contain new revelations of Vaishnavite feeling. Resembling a great deal the medieval Italian art that interpreted the Catholic religion, the Rajput art is, however, less individualistic and more visionary and ardent.”

The artists who painted these pictures were in living contact with Reality, which to them was *Rasa*, Love, Beauty and Joy, and drawing their inspiration therefrom they saw the face of everything transfused with the glory of God Himself. To them nothing was common, and both Nature and Human Life became full of a divine meaning. Divinity was no longer something abstract and impersonal to be understood in terms of negation, but a supremely personal Deity, who, out of the sheer exuberance of His joy, had deigned to manifest Himself as a mere child to draw forth the love of human beings to Himself. Heaven was thus brought home to the doors of humanity, and even the lowliest details of personal and domestic life came to be glorified and sanctified beyond measure. The world was bathed in beauty and joy that were nothing less than divine and it was this which the painters, like the musicians of the new movement, tried to embody in lines and colours. The art of painting inspired thus by the Vaishnavism of Vallabha was of a piece with its poetry, literature and devotion, and along with these it brought *Rasa*, the very joy of God, to all and sundry, enriching the personal, domestic and social life of the whole of Western India.

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## APPENDIX I

### **Saudash Grantho**

#### *Sixteen Books*

We have seen that Vallabha wrote several small books which have been usually put together, the collection being known as *Saudash Grantho* or Sixteen Books. These contain the quintessence of his teaching and are the most popular of his works. It is perhaps no exaggeration to say that they are a kind of Gospel in themselves. They breathe forth a spirit of great simplicity and humility together with a rich personal experience of spiritual reality. Vallabha, besides, speaks in them with an authority, which is evident though veiled under humility. Of these books we have thought it proper to give here fourteen, the two that are omitted being *Yamunastaka*, a Song in praise of the river Yamuna, and *Jala-bheda*, a kind of allegory wherein different kinds of religious people are compared with water in a well, pond, stream, river etc., etc.

The collection usually starts with *Yamunastaka* which is followed by *Bala Bodha*, a Guide to Children. This latter book is a sort of Primer of the new faith, wherein is shown the difference between various forms of belief and Vaishnavism in general. The Children are the simple souls who would follow the way.

#### **Bala Bodha**

##### *Guide to Children*

1 Bowing down to the ever-joyful Hari (the Lord and Saviour Sri Krishna), I indite here the essence of all doctrines,



after having settled them well in my mind for the guidance of children.

2 Dharma (Righteousness), Artha (Economic well-being), Kama (Happiness) and Moksha (Salvation), these four goals of life have been conceived and set up both by men and God, in two different ways.

3 Of these two sets of goals, that which is divine has been declared with the mention of the goal as well as the means to be followed by the Vedas. The other i. e. the human has been declared by the Rishis taught by God.

4-7 I shall describe here the goals as conceived by men; the other are given in the Vedas. The first three kinds of this set of man-conceived goals have been expounded at length in the Dharma-Shastras, Artha-Shastras and Kama-Shastras, for which reason I shall not say anything about them here. As for the fourth kind, viz., the one concerning Salvation, there are four authoritative books, two for each, viz., the one attainable by man's own efforts, and the other through the help of another. The first of these two is again divided into two kinds, one of them being with renunciation known as Samkhya, and the other without it known as Yoga. When the soul becomes self-less after its I-ness and Mine-ness are destroyed and it is established in its original state, it is said to have reached its goal.

8 Many are the means formulated in the Puranas by the Rishis for the attainment of this goal. There is but one end attained by the theistic Samkhya.

9 In the path of Yoga though the goal is attainable without renunciation, it is essential to make an inner renunciation; it is also obligatory to go through (the eight-fold discipline of) Yama, Niyama etc. It is only when one has gone through this successfully that he becomes perfect.

10-12 The salvation attained with the help of another is declared to be of two kinds. Brahma has manifested himself in the Brahmins and he is well-worshipped and served in them. But the above-mentioned goals are not attained with the help of this first Person of the Triad, and in the authoritative book dealing with him this is mentioned just casually. Hence there remain only Vishnu and Shiva, who are the two chief Saviours. They are the Preserver and the Destroyer respectively of all things and are the Propagators of the way of salvation. Both these are described as the soul of all, but it is in virtue of their being manifestations of Brahman.

13-14 Both these Persons are spoken of in their respective books as sinless and perfect. They are capable of giving Happiness and Liberation; but the fact is that Shiva's special province is Happiness here, while that of Vishnu is Liberation. The law of ordinary life is that what is possessed by the master is rarely enjoyed by the servant; nevertheless the master might give his own dearest object to one who is very dear to him. But the service of and faith in these are determined by what each of them gives in the ordinary course of things. In exceptional cases both of them can give both Happiness and Liberation, but it causes them much pain to do so.

15-18 Souls are by nature wicked; therefore to free themselves from their sins they should follow the nine-fold path of Bhakti continuously, and by doing this they will attain their goal. Salvation is attainable through the help of Vishnu and happiness through Shiva. It is by the dedication of the self that the soul belongs to its Master. Even if it does not attain this state of belonging, it should not give up faith in its Master.

19 With this faith intent on attaining to the state of belonging, there should accompany the ordering of one's life according to it, and one should observe the rules of one's state in life; otherwise the guilt of one is two-fold. Herein all has been said, and with this knowledge there is no room for mistake.

In this book Vallabha draws a bare outline of the faith which he wants to inculcate in the minds of ordinary people, showing what is proper and what is not so. He resorts for this purpose to the principle of dichotomy, and proceeds to establish the worship of Vishnu by a gradual process of elimination. He knows that there are many systems of faith and knowledge claiming supremacy over the mind and heart of men. He, therefore, tries to show herein which of these is the best for man in his natural and sinful state to follow.

He starts with dividing the four goals of life as *Alaukika* and *Laukika*, Supernatural and Natural, divinely established and devised by men, especially the wise ones. The first of these two kinds he does not deal with at all, reserving it for a later and special treatment. He divides the goals as set up by Rishis into two parts, the first three on one side and the fourth on the other. It is the latter, viz., the Moksha or salvation which is the most important of all, and he now deals with it. This again he divides into two kinds, viz., Salvation by one's own unaided efforts and that with the help of another. The first of these is again divided into Samkhya and Yoga, and while making distinction between them, he shows both of them as falling short of the final goal. He then takes up the other kind and divides it into the path which has Shiva for its Lord, and that which has Vishnu for its Master. Of these two he shows the latter alone as capable of giving true salvation.

The book following Bala-Bodha usually in the collection contains some of the special teaching of Vallabha in connection with Vaishnavism. It is called:

### **Siddhanta Muktavali**

1 Bowing down to Sri Hari I describe my doctrine after having arrived at a definite conviction about it. We should always worship Sri Krishna. Among worships the best is the mental one.

2 True service ( worship ) is that in which the mind is absorbed in the object of worship. For the full attainment of this, one must serve with one's body and possessions. It is by this that one is freed from the misery of the world and comes to know Brahman.

3 The Supreme Brahman is Krishna indeed ! Akshara Brahman is Sachchidananda (Absolute Being, Consciousness and Joy). This Akshara has two forms, one of them being the Universe and the other altogether different from and transcending it.

4 The first of these ( the Cosmos ) is spoken of in various ways by different theorists, for example, as illusory, or as the effect of the First Cause, or as independent.

5-6 According to the Shruti ( the Vedas ), however, the Akshara Brahman Himself becomes the Cosmos. The two forms of Brahman are to be known in the same way as those of the holy river Ganges. One of these is as water, and the other as a place of pilgrimage and the giver of welfare and salvation to those who, knowing its spiritual greatness, would worship it according to the path laid down for those who would follow the Law. Know Akshara Brahmana in the same way.

7-8 The devotee who believes in the unity of the spirit of the river with its waters sees It sometimes in the visible form of a god owing to his devotion. Though all do not see this form, it is because of It that its waters have their potency. This is known by the mention in the holy books of the effects produced thereby and especially by the personal experience of devotees.

9 As are the waters of the river Ganges, so is the Cosmos; as is the potency of the river, so is the Brahman; as is the goddess of the river, so is Krishna. I shall say more of this presently.

10 The Cosmos is spoken of as three-fold ( made of the three original qualities ); Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva are spoken of

in the same way as each having charge over one of these; in the same way Hari is believed to be the presiding Spirit of Akshara Brahman.

11 The fulfilment of one's wishes in regard to this world is due to Brahma; but that of one's wishes of another sort is in Krishna who is Supreme Joy and the Innermost Self. This is certain.

12-13 Therefore let your mind be centred in Krishna according to the Brahmavada ( Theism revealed by the Vedas ). Just as the devotee of the river Ganges residing on its bank sees the goddess there, in the same way having got rid of the Upadhis ( excrescences such as I-ness and Mine-ness ), attaining Vignana ( Knowledge ) and knowing the Cosmos as Brahman, the man of knowledge sees in himself Krishna, the Supreme Brahman.

14 Just as a man desirous of having the water of the river Ganges is miserable because being far he can not get it, so does a man of the world suffer even though he worships Krishna, being desirous of Him but being far from Him owing to his worldly preoccupations.

15 Therefore, having centred himself in the path of Sri Krishna and having cut himself free from all the world, one should contemplate Krishna alone, who resides in the innermost self and in the Ocean of Joy ( Akshara Brahman ).

16 If a man worships Krishna aiming at the good of Samsara :( his self-made world ), he is troubled in every way; if, however, he persist in worshipping Krishna despite these troubles, his Samsara is destroyed altogether.

17-18 Lacking in knowledge, one who follows the path of Pusti (Grace), should join constantly the worship and the festivals, and he who follows the path enjoined by the Scriptures (Maryada) should study the Bhagavata staying on the bank of Ganges. In the path of Pusti, grace is the only guide, and it alone should dictate where he should stay.



19 Both these will attain the reward of the highest form of worship ( i. e. the mental one ) mentioned above. The path of Bhakti is better than that of Knowledge. That is why this has been said.

20 Just as a man living on the banks of the holy Ganges is lost to the sanctity of such a place by his evil deeds if he be without any devotion for it, in the same way a soul which is without true love ( for God ) is lost by its evil deeds, even though it may have all the outward accessories thereof.

21 This is how I have expounded the fulness of my own Scripture though it was hidden; knowing this a man becomes free from all his doubts.

In this book Vallabha has given an expository outline of the Theism revealed in the Scriptures, especially the Bhagavata Purana. The Deity here is Sri Krishna who alone deserves to be worshipped. In the following book Vallabha develops his doctrine further.

### **Pusti-Pravaha-Maryada Bheda**

1 The paths of Pusti ( Grace ), Maryada ( Law ) and Pravaha ( Current of change ) are all different owing to the inherent differences in the souls following them, in their actions, in their progress and in the goals they reach.

2 I shall describe these in such a way as will remove the doubts of those who will hear what I say. What is called Bhakti-Marga is the Way of Pusti ( Grace ): this is certain.

3 The mention of " the manifestation of two kinds of beings " ( Gita XVI. 6. ) shows the reality of Pravaha ( endless drift ). As for Maryada ( Law ), the very existence of the Vedas shows it to be real.

4 The devotee answering the description " he who is thus devoted to me " ( Gita XII 13... ) is rare. By speaking of him in

this way as the best of all everywhere, the reality of Grace is established; this is certain.

5 All are not included in this; therefore the path of the Drift is different from that of Grace, and of the Vedas different again. This last is proved by the words "when....." (The Bhagavata Bk. IV, Ch. 29), and "neither by the Vedas....." (The Gita XI, 53).

6 Should it be said that there is but one path of Bhakti and the other two are only integral parts thereof, it is not proper; the Scriptural path is different from that of the Sutras and of Reason.

7-8 Just as the difference of the kind of the soul, body and activity of those following Pusti is declared by the Scripture, so is their eternity (declared) by the same; moreover in the path of Pusti, both Pravaha and Maryada being forbidden, it is proved to be different from the others. I shall describe the differences between all these in their creation in regard to their kind, body and works.

9 God has created the (world of) Pravaha with His mind by His will, that of the Vedic path by His speech, and that of Pusti by His essence. This is certain.

10 According to the original world, the reward of the souls of (the world of) Pravaha is worldly, that of the Vedic souls as declared in the Vedas, and that of the Pusti souls from the essence of God's life. Thus the desire for giving the reward being different in each case, they are different.

11-12 The Pravahic souls are different as declared by "These malicious....." (Gita XVI, 19....). The other two kinds are different from these; they have an end and they reach the goal of salvation. Therefore the souls following the path of Pusti are of a different kind without a doubt. They are created for the personal service of God; and for nothing else.

13-14 In their original selves, their incarnation, their signs and qualities, their bodies and activities, they ( Pusti souls ) are not unequal; nevertheless because of the difference in the work required to be done by them, there is difference among themselves. All Pusti souls, however, are not perfectly pure in kind; some of them are mixed. There are three mixed kinds besides.

15-16 These mixed kinds are meant for accomplishing certain purposes of God. Souls in which Pusti is mixed with Pusti are omniscient; in which Pusti is mixed with Pravaha are devoted to rituals; in which Pusti is mixed with Maryada know the attributes of God. The pure Pusti souls are such by means of love and they are very rare. So far I have shown their origin; now I shall declare their difference in the goals they reach.

17 God himself is the reward of the Pusti souls; this ( reward ) is attained in accordance with the difference in the manifestation of God corresponding to their difference in their qualities and spirits.

19-21/1 Sometimes God himself curses souls which are attracted to the world, or are possessed by pride or in order to establish His way in the world through them. These do not become unbelievers, nor are they troubled by diseases etc; mostly they are great in their understanding of the Scriptures, and God's aim in sending them to this world is to make them perfect. They worship God differently in accordance with the difference in the manifestation of God to them. These conform to the Vedic laws and to the rules of the world only outwardly, and not for themselves ( for any good that may accrue to them from it ). Vaishnavism is the natural and spontaneous rule of their life.

21/2-23/1 The souls which tread all the paths but which are of the world are called wanderers. They wander from one place to another moment by moment, and have no love for any one of them. They get everywhere a worldly reward in accordance with their actions.

23/2-24 Now I shall describe the reward of the Pravaha souls with their original form, body and activity. They are demonic and are described by the words "Activity...(Gita XVI. 7... ). They are of two kinds, one wickedly evil and the other unconsciously evil.

25 Those of whom God Himself (in the Gita) has made mention are the wickedly evil, and those who follow in their path are unconsciously evil. The Pusti souls do not follow Pravaha (path) even if they are associated with it by birth; their birth in such families is due to some of their actions only.

### **Viveka-Dhairyashraya Grantha**

1/1 Viveka ( Right Understanding ) Dhairya (Patience) and Ashraya ( Trust ) one should always abide in.

1/2 Viveka is the assurance that God will do everything according to His will.

2 What is the good of doubting the purpose of God by means of Prayer? All things everywhere belong to Him, and all power is His also.

3-4/1 Abiding in the feeling of dependence on God as the Master, one should renounce all pride. God resides in the heart ( of His devotees ); wherefore if He gives any special command transcending those concerning the body and its relations, it should be fulfilled.

4/2-5/1 If there is any trouble or affliction, one should give up his own will altogether. Keeping before oneself only what ought to be and what ought not to be done, one should not have any self-will in regard to things.

5-2 This is Viveka in its true form. Now I shall show the nature of Dhairya.

6/1 To bear ( with equanimity ) the three-fold ( bodily, mental and spiritual ) misery always in every way till one's death is called Dhairya.

6/2 These ( miseries ) should be considered and borne as if they were worthless like butter-milk or in the spirit of Jada-Bharata or the Gopis.

7/1 If any remedy is found by God's will for any of these, one should not obstinately refuse to make use of it.

7/2 One should bear troubles from one's wife and relations, from other people and from the wicked ones.

8 One should give up by both body and mind worldly activities, and one should constantly be conscious of his helplessness so long as these are not renounced owing to one's weakness.

9 Should this be impossible, one should cherish the feeling that God is the support of all, and everything would be possible with his help. Now I shall describe Ashraya.

10/1 In this world and in the next and everywhere God alone is the Refuge.

10/2-11 In such evils as bring misery, in sin, in fear, in the matter of the fulfilment of one's wishes, in sins committed against devotees, in the lack of devotion, in troubles from devotees, in those things which are well within the reach of possibility, the sole Refuge is God.

12-13 In having cherished pride, in the matter of the maintenance and protection of one's dependants, in the troubles that come from one's dependants or disciples, in the attainment of supernatural gifts, in these and all other matters, the Refuge is God. This should be constantly cherished in mind and one should always praise God with his mouth.

14 Worship of any other ( but God ), resort to places of such worship and prayer to any other in any matter, these things should be specially renounced.



15 One should never be without faith, because to be this is a hindrance in every way. One should have full assurance and hope, and one should serve God with whatever one has without any selfishness.

16 One should do all actions that may be prescribed by the Vedas or Society without any selfishness. What is the use of saying anything more? In all things have refuge in God.

17 This is what I say in regard to Trust which is always good for all. In this *Kali Yuga*, the paths in which Bhakti predominates are difficult to follow. This is my belief.

## **Siddhanta Rahasya**

### *The Secret of Doctrine*

1 What was declared to me by God Himself, at mid-night on the eleventh day of the bright half of the month of Shravana, is now being said word for word.

2-3 By means of Brahma-Sambandha, all the sins of body and soul of every one ( who takes this initiation ) are remitted. These sins are of five kinds. As recognised by the world and by the Vedas, they are those attending one's birth, one's place of residence, period of existence, associations and contacts. These should no longer be believed in (as remaining with one).

4 There is no deliverance from all sins in any other way. Therefore one should give up everything that is not dedicated to God.

5 Those who have dedicated themselves should do every action of theirs after dedicating it to God. This is essential. It is improper to dedicate to the God of gods anything that may have been half enjoyed before.

6-7/1 Therefore while taking up any activity, everything should be offered to God to start with. The injunction that what

is once offered (to a god) can not be received back is not applicable in regard to one's offerings to God. That rule applies to paths other than this.

7/2-8/1 Just as a true servant is expected to serve his master, so should one do everything after dedicating it to God. Thereby all things become divine.

8/2-9/1 Just as all the waters with all their various qualities (good and bad) entering into the river Ganges are known by the name of Ganges, so do these things (offered to God) become divine.

### **Nava Ratna Grantha**

#### *Book of Nine Gems*

1 Those who have dedicated themselves should never be anxious (about their salvation), because God never lets down those who are established in the path of Pusti (Grace) into that of the world.

2 One should constantly remind himself of his dedication (to God) in the company of those who have been united with Him, and should remember that He Who is the Lord of all and the Soul of all will do everything according to His will.

3 All (things and persons) that are dedicated (to God) by the devotee are united with Him, and not he alone who has dedicated himself. Hence if these (persons such as one's relations) attach themselves to things other than God, one should not be anxious on that account.

4 All those who have dedicated themselves and united thus their spirit with Krishna should have no anxiety on any account.

5 One should have no anxiety in regard to the matter of the acceptance of his dedication by Sri Purushottama (the Supreme Person); even if there be a lapse, he should give up anxiety because Sri Hari is all-powerful.

6 The Saviour in the Pusti-Marga does not establish (His devotees) in the world or in the Vedic path; hence they should remain as mere witnesses (in the world).

7 One should serve (God) according to the command of (one's) Guru (Teacher); however, God's will (if known independently) should overrule that of the Guru. Serving God in this way one should keep himself happy.

8 If one has troubles in his mind, he should remember that whatever comes to him in this manner is according to God's good pleasure, and knowing this he should renounce anxiety.

9 Therefore one should always and in all things say *Sri Krishna is my Refuge*, and abide in Him. This is my belief.

### **Antahkarana Prabodha**

#### *Exhortation to my heart*

1 O my heart! hear my words with care. It is a fact that there is no power greater and freer from any limitation than that of Krishna.

2 If a scavenging woman were to be wedded to a Prince and become his dearly beloved (wife), and then were to be thrown out, is her later condition any worse than what was hers originally?

3 Did I always live in a holy manner before my dedication? Then in what way have I fallen so low that I should repent?

4-5/1 Vishnu (God) always fulfills His purposes and He will do nothing else. One should always act according to the commands (of God); otherwise one is guilty of treason to his Master. This is the duty of the servant and the Master will fulfill His.

5/2-7/1 The first command given to me at the place of union between the river Ganges and the sea, and the next given in the Madhuvana, were not obeyed by me. They were in regard

to the renouncing of the body and my place of residence respectively. Also a third one about leaving the world (which too was not obeyed by me). But why should I repent on that account? I am a servant of God and nothing else.

7/2-8/1 ( My heart ! ) Do not ever look upon Krishna as a worldly master. Thou hast dedicated thy all with love and so thou art justified. Therefore abide in joy.

8/2-9/1 If a daughter who is come of age is not sent to her husband's place owing to much love (on the part of her parents for her), her husband becomes displeased; similar is the case with one's body.

9/2-10/7 Just think what would have happened to me if my condition had been like that of the people of the world! In impossible things Hari alone is the refuge; therefore thou shouldst not allow thyself to be dominated by God-forgetting delusion.

10/2-11 This is the good advice (to his heart) of Vallabha, the servant of Krishna, hearing which may all devotees attain the state of non-anxiety!

In this book Vallabha lays bare his soul before all, showing at the same time the persistence of the grace of God in spite of the fact that he had disobeyed God's commands given to him thrice. The assurance of being accepted by God remains with him and he wants such assurance to remain with every devotee of God.

## **Sri Krishnashraya Grantha**

### *Book concerning Refuge in God*

1 In this Kali Yuga, when hypocrisy predominates, all good paths have been lost and heresy is rampant, Krishna alone is my Way.

2 The Malechchhas ( non-Hindus ) have surrounded all the holy places with the result that they have become infected

with evil. Besides, the holy people are full of sorrow. At such a time Krishna alone is my Way.

3 Even such supremely holy places as the river Ganges etc., are surrounded by wicked people, and their spirits have disappeared therefrom. In such circumstances Krishna alone is my Way.

4 The learned people have become mad with pride; they follow the path of sin and are bent only upon personal gain and reputation; at such a time Krishna alone is my Way.

5 When owing to the lack of knowledge of the significance of the Mantras ( holy words of the Vedas etc., ), to the absence of proper conditions for the keeping of necessary vows, and to the disappearance of gods, the Mantras have lost all their meaning, Krishna alone is my Way.

6 When owing to beliefs of various kinds all ceremonial actions and vows etc., have lost their value, and the teachers of different schools are trying to propagate only falsehood, Krishna alone is my Way.

7 He Who has been well-known to have destroyed the sins of such great sinners as Ajamila ( Bhagavata VI Chaps 1-3 ), and has thereby shown His wonderful glory, viz., Krishna—may He alone be my Way !

8 All the gods are prakritika beings ( and as such extremely limited ); Akshara Brahman is Joy in measurable quantity; but Hari ( Krishna i-e. the Supreme God ) is Perfect Joy; therefore may Krishna alone be my Way !

9 I who am without Viveka ( right understanding or discrimination ), Patience, Bhakti etc., am devoted to sin and without any merit whatsoever, may Krishna alone be my Way !

10 I humbly appeal to Krishna Who is all-powerful, Who is the giver of all good everywhere and Who is the good Saviour of all those who seek His Refuge.



11 Whosoever recites this Psalm of Krishnashraya ( seeking the Way of Krishna ) in the presence of Krishna, will acquire that Way; this is what Vallabha says.

### **Chatuhsloki Grantha**

#### *Book of Four Verses*

1 The Lord of Vraja alone is to be worshipped always with all one's heart and soul and everything. This is the sole Dharma ( obligatory duty ), and there is none other at any time in any place.

2 This is to be done always. He will attend to everything ( pertaining to the devotee's life ). God is all-powerful; therefore have no anxiety.

3 If thou hast held the Lord of Gokula in thy heart in every way, then what else dost thou expect to get by fulfilling the duties according to the standards of the Society or the Vedas ?

4 Therefore one should always remember and serve the feet of the Lord of Gokula with all one's mind and heart and spirit, and never leave them. This is my conviction.

### **BHAKTI-VARDHANI GRANTHA**

#### *The Way to increase one's devotion*

1 Now is being shown the means by which Bhakti may be increased. This is done by the firm rooting of the seed ( of God's grace ), by renunciation, and by hearing and singing the praises of God.

2 The manner of this rooting of the seed is this, viz., that one should live in his own home following the duties of his particular sphere of life, being freed at the same time from worldly avocation, and that he should worship and serve God with praising and hearing ( the glory of God ) etc..

3 Even though one be engaged in worldly activity, he should continuously engage his mind in hearing ( the praises of God ) etc. In this way Love ( for God ) is born in one, and then Asakti ( attachment ) and then Vyasana ( state of addiction ).

4 The seed is now said in the Scripture ( of Bhakti ) to be firmly rooted, and it can be destroyed no more. By means of such love ( for God ), love ( for things of the world ) is destroyed, and by addiction is destroyed the love for one's home.

5 Then ( in this state of addiction ) the members of one's household appear to be hindrances and as aliens to the true self. When one has ( reached the state of ) inebriation in Krishna, he has reached his goal.

6-7/1 Even for the Tadrashis ( God-inebriated souls ) residence in the home is destructive. Therefore, renouncing it and aiming altogether at the attainment ( of God ), he who makes an effort for it attains the firmly-rooted and supreme Bhakti.

7/2-8 In the renunciation ( of home etc. ) many hindrances arise from evil company and from food ( that might come from unworthy persons ). Therefore, such persons ( as renounce their homes ) should live in God's ( i. e. holy ) places and with people who are devoted to God. This should be done in such a way that he may be neither too far from nor too near to them; otherwise his spirit might be harmed in some way ( by much familiarity ).

9 Whosoever has his attachment to God well-established in the service ( of God ) or in the hearing ( of God's praises etc. ), will never more be destroyed; this is my conviction.

10 Fearing the possibility of hindrances, one should not seek solitude. Hari will protect him everywhere. This is certain.

11 Thus have I described the Scripture of God which is full of profound meaning. Whosoever repeats it will have his love ( for God ) well-established.

## Pancha Padyani

### *Five Verses*

1 Those, whose minds are absorbed in Krishna-Rasa ( the bliss of Krishna ), who are free from the world and who have withdrawn themselves from all the activities enjoined by the world and the Vedas, are of the highest order of the aspirants after devotion.

2 Those whose minds have become tender ( with the love of God ), who are excited with fervour at the remembrance of God and who are devoted to the goal of getting their salvation, are of the middle order of aspirants.

3-4 Those who know Krishna-Tattwa ( God as pervading Spirit ) in every way without any doubt, and who are excited with fervour only when they are overflowing with devotion or when they have withdrawn themselves from the objects of the world, but not otherwise, who aim at the perfect goal with all their mind and heart and soul and strength only at fitful intervals, and who are at times attached to the things of the world, are of the lowest order of devotees.

5 Those who engage themselves in hearing ( the praises of God ) etc., in all conditions of place, time and circumstance and with personal freedom, Mantras, ( holy formulas ) etc., with single-minded devotion are the best of devotees.

In this booklet we have a description of the three kinds of devotees according to Vallabha's classification. Of these the first and the third deserve to be noticed carefully, especially his use of the term *Krishna-Rasa* in regard to the first and *Krishna-Tattwa* in regard to the third. Evidently God Who is Krishna in his eyes is *Rasa* more than *Tattwa*; rather while the latter is a kind of an outer body of God, the former is His very essence. Vallabha places thus the Jnani ( the man of knowledge ) much lower than the Bhakta ( the devotee ).

## Sannyasa Nirnaya Grantha

*Book concerning the determination of the  
nature of Sannyasa*

1/1 Now is being determined Renunciation for the removal of repentance.

1/2-2 This is especially enjoined in the two holy paths of Bhakti and Jnana. Those who follow the path of Karma (obligatory ritualistic action etc.,) should not resort to it, particularly in the Kali Yuga. Therefore we shall now consider the renunciation that is obligatory in the path of Bhakti.

3-4/1 This (renunciation) is not desirable for the purpose of engaging oneself in hearing (the praises of God etc., i. e. the nine-fold Bhakti). It is necessary to have the company of others for the proper use and protection of these means (of attaining Bhakti). Besides the pride and the sense of authority (which a Sannyasi has) are contrary to the duties obligatory in the path of Bhakti.

4/2-6 If it be said that the life of the householder is a hindrance in the attainment of this (nine-fold) Bhakti, one is sure to have the company of similar (worldly) people after renunciation, owing to which, in course of time, he comes to be dominated by sensuality and becomes a hypocrite. The body which is laden with sensuality is never taken hold of by God. Therefore in the path of Bhakti, for the purpose of its attainment by proper means, renunciation is not a blessing.

7 Renunciation is commendable for experiencing the state of separation (from God). In this renunciation the particular garb is for the sake of the freedom (that it gives) from the bonds of one's home and people, and for nothing else.

8 Rishi Kaundinya and the Gopis are said to be the Gurus of such renunciation, and the way to practise it is the one they

followed. Whatever feeling helps in the realization of a particular experience is the *Sadhana* ( means ) thereof.

9 Travail and sickness (of soul) are of the nature (of this separation); they are not of this world (but are divine). To those who are in such a condition, knowledge and the Attributes of God are a hindrance.

10 The knowledge that comes especially by renunciation (as ordinarily understood) gives one a place in Satya-loka, whereas in this (Path of Bhakti) the feeling (of love and separation) is the means and the end also is similar.

11-12/1 The former live in Satya-loka etc. without a doubt; as for the latter when their inner self manifests itself like fire outwardly and then re-enters again ( into themselves ), all the bonds are destroyed altogether and ( they are destroyed ) in no other way.

12/2 Those who have renounced society (owing to the feeling of separation), to them the Attributes (of God) become the sole bond of life (here on this earth).

13 (To such devotees) God Himself is the reward; therefore He is not a hindrance. (He allows this state of separation to remain until it becomes fully ripe for its fulfilment). (The pronouncing of) The word of wholeness is not obligatory (on God). He is merciful and so does not act contrary to His nature.

14/1 This renunciation is hard to attain; it is realized by love, and in no other way.

14/2-15 In the path of knowledge, renunciation is thought of in two ways. The first kind is for the attainment of knowledge, and the second is the last step in the attainment of salvation, But even in the latter kind the fulfilment comes after hundreds of births. In knowledge there is need for Yagna ( sacrifice ), hearing etc.



16-17/1 Therefore, in this Kali Yuga, renunciation is for repentance and for nothing else; any other kind leads to hypocrisy. Therefore in the path of knowledge there is no renunciation. This Age being full of sin, this is the only condition (for renunciation).

17/2-18 If it be asked what should be done when any of these sins (of the Dark Age) are found in the path of Bhakti, the reply is this:—There is no destruction in the beginning of this path, nor is there any example of such. In the renunciation, the object of which is to attain wholeness, what possibility is there of a hindrance ?

19 Since God Himself can not put hindrance in this path, who else is capable of doing so ? If it were not so, the mother would cease to feed the child at her breasts.

20 It is said (in the Markandeya Purana) that even those who have attained supreme knowledge are deluded (by the Maya of God); but the devotees (of God) can not be so deluded. God is the giver of His spirit and is dear (to his devotees). Hence how will He allow them to be deluded ?

21 Therefore the renunciation as described here is to be practised; any other kind leads one off the highest goal. This is my sure conviction. It is by the grace of Krishna that Vallabha has ascertained this, viz., that the renunciation of the path of Bhakti is the only proper one, and that any other leads to the downfall and degradation of man.

### **Nirodha-Laxana Grantha**

*Book showing the characteristics of Self-Control*

1 May that agony (of spirit at the separation from God) which was felt in Gokula by Yasoda and Nanda (the foster-parents of Krishna), and the Gopis and the Gopis, be felt by me now and then !

2 When will God give me that bliss which was enjoyed by the Gopis and all the people of Vraja in Gokul ?

3 When shall I experience the great festival of joy that took place in Vrindavana and Gokula at the advent of Uddhava ?

4 So long as God will be merciful owing to the grace of the great ones ( the true devotees ), the singing of the name and the praises of Him Who is the ocean of joy is blissful.

5 The adoration ( of God ) indulged in with the grace of the great ones is blissful, but the one carried on in the manner of the people of the world is not so; the first kind is like the food soaked with butter etc., whereas the other is like dry food.

6 The happiness that one finds in the adoration of Govinda ( Krishna ) is not attained by even such persons as Suka etc., in their spirit, let alone others.

7 When God becomes gracious seeing His own people in agony, He comes out from their hearts and manifests Himself outwardly as the ever-Joyful one.

8 Even though God is Perfect Joy, the joy of His grace is hard to attain. The Perfect God seated in the heart hearing His praises drowns His devotees in His joy.

9 My mind is withdrawn in God through its being actively engaged (in serving Him through my different senses etc.), and I have attained the sense of complete withdrawal. I am describing this withdrawal to those who seek it in order that they might engage themselves in such activity.

10 Therefore, those who want to attain such withdrawal should, after renouncing all, always sing the praises of God devoting themselves to the God of Perfect Joy. By this they will attain Sachchidanandta (the state of God who has the qualities of Being, Knowledge and Bliss).

11 The souls which have forsaken God are absorbed in the world, and those who have attained the state of withdrawal are enjoying bliss continuously.

12 For the sanctification of the senses which have become evil owing to their being laden with worldliness, all things should be dedicated to Krishna who is the Lord of all.

13 One who devotes his mind continually to the qualities of Murari (Krishna called by this name because He killed the devil Mura), suffers no more from the pain of separation from the Sam-sara (the world of I-ness and Mine-ness), and he becomes blissful like God.

14-1 There God is experienced as merciful; otherwise He is believed to be cruel.

14-2 In this matter one should have no fear that he will suffer from any hindrance; the reflection of God in the senses becomes complete (in course of time).

15 By the might of the grace of God non-attachment towards the (worldly) objects of senses becomes fixed; and one never feels pain since he has the touch of bliss resulting from the adoration of God.

16 Knowing thus the adoration of God as superior to the path of knowledge, He is to be praised and adored always without jealousy towards any one and greed.

17 One should always contemplate God with his mind and thoughts; he should see Him and touch Him in reality, and do all things and move in Him.

18 He should listen to and sing (God's praises) experiencing Him as present, and engage himself in the act of (conjugal) love only to produce a son who is dear to Krishna. Even the sense by which the body is relieved of its dirt should be pressed into the service of God as the one which scavenges the body and thus makes it fitter for the service of God.

19 Whenever any of these senses is seen not engaged in the service of God, the control of such is necessary; this is essential.

20 There is no Mantra ( holy formula ), no Psalm, no Knowledge and no place of pilgrimage greater than this ( Nirodha or withdrawal in God ).

## Seva-Falam

### *The Reward of Service*

1/1 Now is being said the reward for the full attainment of such Service ( mental one ) as has been described.

1/2 2/1 In the gift of divine grace, the first is the fulfilment of aspirations, then follows the acquisition of reward and also that of privilege; in this time has no control.

2/2 Anxiety, hardship and pleasures are hindrances ( to the attainment of the mental service. )

3 If God does not will it, then there is no help whatsoever. In that case the only way is to have such discrimination as will give a firm conviction concerning the truth.

4 The hindrances ( mentioned above ) must be renounced. Of the pleasures one kind ( those of the world ) should be renounced, and one kind ( of the world ) of the other ( the hardships ). The great pleasure ( of the divine kind ) is no hindrance; it is always included in the reward.

5 The pleasure ( of the worldly kind ) is a stumbling-block, is mean and destructive, and ordinary hardships are destructive too by means of their violence. But in the hardships ( imposed by God ), one should give up all anxieties and ( resigning himself to God's will ) should expect to remain in the world.

6 If the first kind of hindrance ( anxiety ) come from God, it means that God does not desire to give the reward. In

the third kind ( that from the worldly pleasures ) one should renounce his home.

7 One should always think of these hindrances and of the way to get rid of them. Apart from this everything else is a delusion.

8 Souls suffering from these hindrances should act in the way mentioned above. But in the Path of Grace there is no delay. If one suffers in any way owing to the predominance in him of any of the three qualities ( Satva, Rajas and Tamas ), he should bear all this ( that has been said here ) in mind. This is my belief.

9/1 The rise of any evil thoughts in connection with this is a delusion.



## APPENDIX II

### TATTWARTHA-DIPA-NIBANDHA

#### Light of Knowledge

##### *Chapter concerning the meaning of Scripture*

1 I bow down to God Who manifests Himself as Jagat ( the Cosmos ) with all its different names and forms, Who sports ( in these forms ), from Whom the Cosmos has come, and Who as Krishna performs wonderful deeds

2 Those who are Satvika ( spiritually-minded ), who are the devotees of God, who are fit for salvation, and who in accordance with the will of God are now in their last birth—it is for them that the following is being said.

3 Knowing full well the Scripture of God, meditating on it again and again, and knowing the words of God Himself, the following is being said to remove all doubt.

4 There is but one Scripture, viz., the Song Celestial ( the Bhagawad-Gita ) sung by the son of Devaki, and there is but one God, the son of Devaki; there is but one Mantra ( holy formula ), viz., His names, and there is but one Seva ( Service or worship ), viz., His service.

5 Meditating thus constantly and having arrived at sure conviction, I describe the meaning of Scriptures, the essence of Knowledge and the spirit of the Bhagavata.

6 God is called in the Upanishads Brahman, in the Smritis Parmatman, and in the Bhagavata Bhagawana. I also shall use these three names in the three chapters respectively.

7 The Vedas, the words of Sri Krishna ( the utterances of Krishna Himself in the Gita ), Vyasa-Sutras and the Samadhi-Bhasha ( personal experiences related in ecstatic and inspired language ) of Vyasa ( in the Bhagavata ),—these are the authoritative Canon of Scripture.

8 Of these four, each succeeding Scripture is meant to remove the doubts springing from the preceding one. Whatever other books are not contrary to these are authoritative, and whatever is contrary to them is never to be accepted as authority.

9 All Scriptural and other books are different forms of God, differing in name and form; hence all are authoritative after we have renounced whatever is contrary in them (to the first four).

10 In the beginning of Dwapara-Yuga, religion having assumed two forms ( Shrauta i. e. the revealed and Smarta i. e. the traditional ), just as contrary texts have been resolved into harmony, so are the conclusions.

11 In the first part of the Vedic Scriptures, God is (seen) in the form of the Yagna (Sacrifice): in the second (the Upanishads) He is in that of Brahman: in the Bhagavata God is described as the Incarnate Saviour Krishna.

12 God who assumes the forms of Surya (Sun) etc., is said to be a part of Knowledge in Brahma-kanda (the Upanishads), and in the same way the various gods of the Puranas are different forms of Hari (the Saviour).

13 To attain some definite reward (such as heaven etc.,) God is to be worshipped in these forms of His; but for the purpose of attaining fellowship with Him, the Primal Form of God, viz., Krishna, alone is to be worshipped.

14 The salvation that is *nirguna* (free from such qualities as Satva, Rajas and Tamas) is attained only by such service, whereas the salvation that is *saguna* is attained by the worship of other gods. Even by Knowledge (as given in the Upanishads) one attains only Satvic salvation and Jivan-Mukti. If however the man of knowledge worships Krishna, there is none greater than he.

15 In this KaliYuga (Dark Age) God having incarnated Himself as Buddha, the gods who minister to the latter incarnate themselves in the form of Brahmins who delude people by spreading various kinds of errors and thus prevent them from worshipping Krishna.

16 Herein lies the great delusion and the deception that even those who are highly intellectual and are students of Scriptures do not worship Krishna; this is the case with them despite the fact that they perform good deeds. Men like these who are devoted to works will have to be reborn again and again.

17 Full devotion to the path of knowledge is said to be attained by one when he becomes omniscient; that to the path of works when one has a serene mind; that to the path of Bhakti when Krishna is pleased with him.

18 Without full devotion (in the case of any of these paths) no reward can be secured, and it is certain that such devotion does not come by mere talking about it or vain imaginings; it comes only by adopting the proper means.

19 All these three paths bear fruit according to the deserts of those that follow them; but in this Dark Age, man has no merit of his own. Therefore, if one serves Krishna, even the Dark Age becomes fruitful for him.

20 This is the chief meaning of the Vedas, the Gita and the Shrutis; all other meanings are only imagined by men owing to their vain thinking.

21 Those who interpret the Scriptures ( the Vedas ) in accordance with the words of Krishna ( in the Gita ), are the only true Brahmavadins ( men who have attained true Knowledge ), the only true holy ones ( those who perform ritual works in a proper manner ), and the true Bhagavatas ( the devotees of God ).

22 Not knowing this meaning, even the Satvic men get entangled into the mess of false opinions and do not serve God. This is why I am engaged in this task.

23 The Prapancha ( the Cosmos ) is the work of God Himself. Everything has been created by Maya ( the Power of God ). What is called Samsara\* ( the World ) in relation to souls arises out of the power of Avidya ( which causes delusion ).

24 The Samsara ( the World ) disappears in salvation, but the Prapancha ( the Cosmos ) does not. When Krishna wants to sport with Himself alone, the dissolution takes place, and it is for the bliss of souls. The Avidya ( the power causing delusion ) caused by the Power of God attaches itself to souls.

25 Brahman is all-pervading like ether and is surrounded by the Power of God. He has arms, legs, toes, eyes, heads and mouths everywhere.

26 He has ears everywhere. Brahman indwells everything by pervading it; He is infinite in form, without division and with division according to His desire.

27 By the mere desire which was expressed by the words "May I be many!", souls arose as so many parts of Brahman.

28 In the beginning of creation, by the will of God came out all the formless souls as sparks fly from fire.

29 From the Joy-form of God came out the Indwelling Spirits which have in them the three attributes of God, viz., Being,

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\*The world which is the creation of man's selfishness, and is thus imaginary and false.

Consciousness and Joy. The Jivas (individual souls) are without Joy and Matter is without Joy and Consciousness.

30 Therefore the Jivas are without Joy. Matter, Souls and Indwellers are thus different in appearance (though they are all made of one God).

31 Both Vidya (Gnosis) and Avidya (Nescience) are the powers ordained by God and meant to affect the Jivas, and it is owing to them that they suffer from misery and littleness.

32 Ignorance of one's true self and the fourfold delusion, viz., that from senses, that from body, that from vital energy and the one from mind-these are five forms of Avidya (Nescience).

33 Being bound by these five kinds of Avidya, the souls go through the cycles of life and death. When this Avidya is destroyed by Vidya (Gnosis), souls become free from bonds even while they are in body.

34 Then the body, the senses and the vital energy, become free from delusion, but they do not disappear in those who are free from bonds while here.

35 By the worship of the great Vital Energy and God, the senses become divinised, and the soul becoming divine gets absorbed in Brahman.

36 By the manifestation of the part of Joy in himself, the soul attains Brahma-bhava (Divinity) and fellowship with God. These can be attained only by the worship of Hari (God). Thus God Himself does everything sometimes.

37 Sometimes He does this through the instrumentality of the Purusha, sometimes in another way, and sometimes God Himself becomes all this.

38 Sometimes God creates everything in an illusory manner by His Maya (power), in which case knowledge etc., is only empty words but no reality.



39 Sometimes God, by creating the Cosmos with ether etc., and entering it with His two forms, viz., the Souls and Indwellers, enjoys Himself by sporting with these differences.

40 All that has been said here (in regard to the various kinds of creation) is possible to the Unthinkable and the Infinitely Powerful God. This is why creation has been spoken of as being of many kinds in the Scriptures.

41 In all these the glory of God is described with the purpose of perfecting devotion to Him. The words *Tattwamasi* (Thou art That) and others of a like nature have also the same purpose.

42 The love with a full knowledge of the glory of God, which is, besides, well-established and surpasses all other kinds of love, is called Bhakti. This alone gives salvation, and nothing else.

43 God is in five forms, in twelve forms and in ten forms also; in the same way He manifests Himself in a hundred, thousand and infinite forms. He is the one in all, He is equal (in all), without any defects, perfect in His holy attributes in everything, and much to be praised.

44 Without any defects, perfect in all holy attributes, independent, free from all the qualities of lifelessness and of the material body, one whose hands, feet, mouth, stomach etc., are in the form of Bliss only, and who is free from the three-fold distinction—such is Brahman.

45 By knowing Him one attains final freedom after destroying his Avidya (nescience). Vairagya (detachment from the world), Samkhya, Yoga, Penance and Devotion to God—this is the five-fold Vidya (gnosis).

46 By means of this Vidya, the knowing man enters into God. Those who possess spiritual qualities and are spiritually minded are fit for salvation.

47 Sometimes a man might attain salvation by living in some holy place, but this is possible only by the grace of Krishna (God) and to none else. This is certain.

48 Krishna (God) gives solvation to His devotees at some times and in some places; this is why such times and places are looked upon as holy.

49 Therefore leaving everything (all reliance on places and times), and having firm faith in God, one must worship God by means of hearing etc., (the nine-fold Bhakti); one attains true Gnosis thereby and becomes free.

50-51 Those who have entered into the joy of Brahman (by their knowledge) experience happiness only through their spirit, because for them their senses etc. have been absorbed, whereas the devotees have something more. They experience happiness with all their senses, their mind and spirit. This is why the house of devotees is superior to the experience of oneness with Brahman.

52 When the rubbish of the Scriptures that produce delusion separates itself from the intellect, one gets faith in the Bhagavata etc., and he gets the true reward thereby.

53 Jiva (individual soul) is in size small as the end of a grain of rice; but its light spreads itself all through the body like incense (in a room). It is said to be pervading; this applies to it when it has the spirit of God.

54 When the Joy-element (of God) manifests itself in the soul, millions of universes appear in it. The soul is thus limited as well as unlimited.

55 The spirit-part of the soul is radiating light. This is why the soul is spoken of as full of light. The soul can not be held by the physical senses, nor can it be lighted by any other light.

56-57 The soul can be seen in three ways; by the mind which has been prepared to do this by Yoga; by the sense of sight which can see God; and by divine insight. It is by the disappearance

of the Joy-element (of God) that the soul seems to appear as a shadow and a reflection, and in no other way. If it were not so, the spirit veiled by the illusive power of God would not be reflected.

58 But this theory of the soul being a reflection is contrary to the Scriptural text, such as "The two birds..." and "Seated in the heart's cave", and also to the words of God (in the Gita).

59 If the soul is believed to be a reflection, its disappearance is salvation, but the presence of the body makes it impossible to have Jeevan-Mukti (freedom from bonds while living in body). If it be said that the reflection is in Avidya (Nescience), the same objection holds true.

60 Just as in a man who is fast asleep, the body is not working owing merely to his Prarabdha (Fate or automatic working out of his past deeds), in the same way in Jeevan-Mukti, the body is not able to move owing to the absence of the presiding spirit.

61-62/1 The words *Thou art That* etc., which are given so much importance to by mere logical understanding, are not able to produce Vidya (Gnosis which brings one to God). These words are uttered with some other purpose in view. They are meant to establish the reality of Souls and Matter with the ultimate purpose of describing the fact of Brahman being all.

62/2-63/1 Brahman is supernatural and hence can not be expounded by natural reason. Brahman can be known only by penance, by reason working in subservience to the Vedas and by the grace of God. It is after much painful effort that a man attains Vidya (the Science of God) in some country in Satya-Yuga.

63/2-64 The sign of (one's attainment of) Vidya is omniscience and divine light. Even this does not bring one salvation. Just as the states of waking and sleeping are mutually dependent, so are Vidya and Avidya. For salvation devotion alone is always believed to be the proper means.

65 Brahman is Sachchidanandarupa (Absolute Reality, Consciousness and Joy), all-pervading, unchangeable, omnipotent, independent, omniscient and without any material qualities.

66 Brahman is *sajatiya* (homogeneous), *vijatiya* (heterogeneous), and without any distinctions in Himself. He is invested with thousands of eternal qualities such as truth etc.

67 He is the support of all, the controller of Maya (Power), in the form of joy, the highest and different from (the qualities of) the material bodies of the universe.

68 The same Brahman is the material cause of the Jagat (the Cosmos), and also the efficient cause. He sometimes makes sport within Himself and sometimes with joy in the Cosmos.

69 Whatever happens in whatever way at whatever time in whomsoever by whomsoever, and with and for whatsoever—all this is God Himself, the Lord of all.

70 Brahman who, abiding in the heart of all things, does not touch anything, who shines through all by pervading it and taking it to be His body, but whom the body does not know as such, is not the subject of any theory, and yet He is expounded by all theories (in one form or another).

71 Brahman is infinite in forms, is motionless, motionful, the support of contrary qualities and unknowable by human reason.

72 Brahman causes delusion (in the mind of souls) by manifesting Himself in various ways through His presence and absence. He is invisible to the powers of the senses, but is visible through His will.

73 When the Blissful One (Anandarupa) enters pure Satva, His presence manifests itself in a darkened form like a diamond.

74 Just as Brahman has different forms owing to His fruition in different qualities, in the same way in the four Yugas also Brahman manifests Himself in different forms, because in each of these *Yugas* (Ages), the form of Time reflects itself in Him.

75 Brahman, who is invisible, appears blue like the vacuum or sky to the ordinary eye; in no other way He is apprehended by the sense of sight.

76 Though the creation of the Cosmos is from and of Brahman, He is free from partiality and cruelty. According to heretic beliefs, Karma (past action) is recognized as the originating cause (of differences between men etc.), but Karma in its true form is Brahman.

77 Though Brahman is the Creator of the Cosmos, He does not have the qualities of the Cosmos (such as Satva, Rajas and Tamas). The gods (who preside over these qualities and) who are conscious of them are parts of Brahman and they are known as partakers of the qualities. The Creator is altogether free from them and His freedom is contrary to any attachment of the qualities.

78 Those who have lost the purity of their intellect attach a stain to God's causality of the Universe by torturing the meaning of the sacred texts.

79 They say that Brahman is the cause of the universe by being bound with eternal Avidya (Nescience), and that Brahman is involved in the round of birth and death. They believe in freedom attainable by imaginary texts.

80 Thus this deceitful philosophy which destroys all the glory of God is contrary to the Shrutis and Smritis, and therefore the devotees of God are to steer clear of it. In this Dark Age it is the chief favourite (with men). But the punishment of turning away from God is hell.



81 ( It is not proper to say that ) the illusory character of the Universe is taught in order to destroy the ignorance ( born of Avidya ), because that can be accomplished by a proper exposition of Vidya and Avidya.

82 The illusoriness spoken of in the Puranas is only a heretical opinion just expressed in connection with the idea of creation as a kind of snare made by gods. In the Shrutis that are known to us such a belief is not found anywhere.

83 The texts ( in the Chhandogya Upanishad ) teach only the absence of distinction between Brahman and Cosmos, but not the illusory character of the latter. The greatness of Vyasa forbids us to believe in such a distinction.

84 If it be said that the Vedic texts expounding the creation of the Universe are only for the purpose of accomodation to the weak-minded ( those who are devoted to the Karma-kanda i. e. Rituals ), it is not true, because this holds true in the case of both ( those devoted to ) Karma-kanda and Jnana-kanda.

85 If it be said that such attribution of creation etc., to God is for the purpose of eliminating all that is non-Brahman from Him with the purpose of the realization of Him alone and that in reality there is no creation etc., this also is not true.

86 The visible reality of the effect ( the Universe ) is in no way contradictory to the manifest and chief meaning of the Scriptural texts. Even in the theory that speaks of the Universe as an illusion, the creatorship of God like that of a conjuror is accepted.

87 If the Universe be accepted as illusory, salvation becomes altogether an unreality like the elephant seen in a dream. The creation of the Universe by Maya ( Illusion ) or by ( the ignorance of ) the Jivas is contrary to the teachings of the Vedas and the Brahma-Sutras.

88 Whatever is said in regard to Brahman not being the creator of the Universe is only for the sake of showing the infinite greatness of God by pointing out the contrary qualities in Him. It is not, therefore, proper to disregard one part of these contrary qualities by mere reason.

89 The illusory character of the Universe taught by the Puranas is only for the purpose of awakening the sense of detachment from the world. To say, therefore, that the universe is the result of Avidya (Nescience) is to mislead one.

90 It is only the Asuras (the devilish people) who speak of the Universe as unreal, unestablished in God, without God, born only of the union between different sexes and with lust as its sole purpose. To the mind of such people what else could it be ?

91 In the indivisible Advaita (Monism) all is Brahman, and there is no distinction. The distinctions appear only to the distinction-making intellect, but in reality they do not exist.

92 Brahman being the material (cause of all), no difference is possible. The differences, being due only to the necessity of language, can not arise in reality.

93 Samkhya is of many kinds, but only one among them is rightly authoritative. This is the one in which the twenty-eight elements have God for their essence.

94 The other kinds of Samkhya are not acknowledged in the Brahma-Sutras. As for Yoga, that kind is acceptable in which God is to be contemplated, or that other kind which, though not aiming at the contemplation of God, is helpful in realizing the soul.

95 To worship God with these five things, viz., Detachment from the world, Knowledge, Yoga, Penance and Love, helps

a man to get the final reward; if one were to worship God with even one of these in a firm manner, he attains his end.

96 The final dissolution of the Universe is spoken of in many ways in the path of Knowledge, and in one way in Samkhya; all this is said, however, for the purpose of purifying the mind.

97 In the same way the senses are said to be absorbed by sublimating them in their presiding deities. But their sanctification and deification can take place only by the worship of God and of Vital Energy and in no other way.

98 The firm knowledge of the one Soul produces Vairagya (detachment from the world), which frees one from his home; it is for this purpose that the senses are absorbed in the mind.

99 All the various Layas (dissolutions) are to be experienced only in the mind; in reality there is no dissolution of the Universe. When the Universe and the body are spoken of as mental states, it is only for the purpose of inducing Vairagya.

100 Those who believe in the principles of various sects worship God according to the path of Bhakti, and they teach everything accordingly. Thus their worship which is not contrary does not offer an obstacle. But they do not get the full reward because of their action being contrary to the path of Bhakti.

101 Thus everything is by God and God is in the form of all:—with this knowledge, with love and with the help of the nine-fold devotion, he who worships God is the best of devotees.

102 He who worships God with this knowledge but without love is a devotee of the middling kind, and he who worships God with love but without this knowledge is also a devotee of the same kind. Even though both knowledge and love be lacking and one were to practise the nine-fold devotion, his sins are destroyed.

103 The practice of the nine-fold devotion with the help of Penance and Vairagya makes one's knowledge perfect; with the help of Yoga the nine-fold devotion makes one's love perfect. Mention of the attainments of the end by means of the nine-fold devotion ( alone ) is a kind of exaggeration.

104 Whatever truth has been established by all the Vedic texts, the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, the Panch-Ratra, avarious other Scriptures snd the Brahma-Sutras, has been established by God with His heart ( in the Bhagawad-Gita ).

105 We have expounded the meaning of the Scriptures thus with the help of the authoritative Scriptural Books. Now is being said the final conclusion with the help of God Himself.\*

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\* Here endeth the first part of this Nibandha, which alone has been translated by us.





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